Matthew's community discourse : a literary, reaction-critical and social-scientific reading of Matthew 18.1-35.

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Title:

Matthew's Community Discourse: A Literary, Redaction-Critical, and Social-Scientific Reading of Matthew 18.1-35

by

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Abstract

Matthew's community discourse is read respectively from a literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific perspective. By subjecting the discourse to a plurality of readings, the present study aims to scrutinize the interpretative process and offer reflections on the central interpretative question: what does it mean to interpret a text?

Part I on methods is an exposition of the literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific readings adopted in this thesis. Each reading embodies a way of perceiving the meaning of the text. The four chapters that follow in part II are the interpretations of the individual text-segments of the community discourse (18.1-4, 5-9, 10-20, 21-35) in the order of literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific reading. The interpretation proper is preceded by a discussion of the narrative context of the community discourse.

The main results of our investigation can be summarized as follows: (1) Textual interpretation is an active interaction between a reader or interpreter and the text. Meaning is construed, not "discovered" as if it were lying in the text; it is intimately related to the interpretative context in which a reader situates the text.

(2) The pluralistic readings are in fact called for by the narrative, redactional, and historical (referential) dimension of the discourse, and of the Gospel in general. The three dimensions of the discourse thus entail an

inherent literary, redactional, and historical meaning. Yet each level of meaning needs to be construed by the interpreter.

When a text-segment in the community discourse has a relatively close parallel in Mark or Luke, the authorial meaning may be ascertained with more confidence. But for the literary, and historical meaning, there is a relatively higher degree of subjectivity in the construction of meaning.

(3) Literary, redaction-critical, social-scientific readings all presuppose a different interpretative framework which embodies the interpretative aim and interest, the way of reading, and hence the way of conceiving meaning of a text.

CONTENT

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

This famous two-line poem of Ezra Pound is cited by Robert Crosman in his essay, "Do Readers Make Meaning?" (1980)[1] to illustrate the critical principle (accepted by Crosman) that meaning of a text cannot be severed from the context of the reader, and that in general it is readers who make meaning.[2] Crosman does not dispute the usual reading of Pound's poem that "in the midst of technological ugliness mankind is still beautiful" (p. 153). But to illustrate the meaning-creation dimension of a reader's context, Crosman also produced a reading by a hypothetical *dairy farmer* who reads the poem as "a statement that we should drink milk regularly" (p. 153). It is worthwhile to quote Crosman's words in full regarding this contextualized reading:

> Like us, he [the dairy person] understands that the poet saw beautiful faces in the subway, but the image of petals on a bough reminded him of apple orchard where his cows like to forage. Since milk cows have been brought into the picture, it is only a small and logical leap to remember that beautiful faces require a healthy diet, of which milk is an essential part

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[1] See *The Reader in the Text*, edited by S.R. Suleiman and I. Crosman (1980), 149-64; quotation on p. 151.

[2] Crosman (1980:151) regards authorial intention as one among many interpretative contexts in which a text may be situated.

(pp. 153-54).[3]

To the present writer, Crosman's reading appears eccentric, and it brings out forcefully the problem of a free reader-oriented reading, namely, the contextual saturation of the meaning of a text - a *reader's context saturates a text with meaning*.[4] Crosman's reading also highlights the central questions of textual interpretation: what is actually involved in the interpretative process? does a text inherently possess a plurality of meaning? and where is its meaning(s) located?

I. The Goal of the Study

The above hermeneutical questions are also implicit in the variety of gospel interpretations which result from reading the New Testament Gospel from different perspectives. In fact, a pluralistic approach to Matthew's community discourse is reminiscent of Robert Crosman's reading of Ezra Pound's poem: how and what does a text mean? In reading the same gospel text (Matthew 18) from different perspectives, an interpreter is, on self-reflection, confronted with the relation of text to interpretative context. If Crosman imagines how a dairy

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[3] See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (1980), ch. 13. Through an apparently straightforward question from a college student, "Is there a text in this class?" Fish draws attention to the contextual nature of meaning in verbal communication.

[4] I owe the notion of contextual saturation of the meaning of a text to E.S. Malbon (1993) who in turn appropriates the concept from Dominick LaCapra's *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (1983).

farmer would interpret Ezra Pound's poem in his life situation, an interpreter/reader would similarly consider what the evangelist would plausibly mean in his historical context as he wrote, and/or what the first recipients of Matthew's Gospel would have appropriated from the community discourse. Different ways of reading would result from situating the text in different interpretative contexts which reflect the interpreters' different interests and concerns.

Matthew's community discourse is here approached from a literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific perspective. It is hoped that a pluralistic approach may yield a richer understanding of the text and provide some insights into the nature and process of interpretation.

By focusing on a particular text and subjecting it to a number of different readings, I hope to show (1) that a plurality of different but complementary readings of a text is possible, (2) that the variety of meanings may come from different interpretative approaches which ask different kinds of literary or historical questions, (3) that there are indeed some common grounds between historical and literary approaches. The concluding chapter offers hermeneutical reflections on the fundamental question: what does it mean to interpret a text?

II. The Distinctive Features of the Community Discourse and their Implications for Interpretation

In the following pages we shall provide a brief overview of the community discourse, and indicate that the

distinctive features of the fourth discourse (shared also by the Matthean discourses in general) actually call for different interpretative approaches to the gospel text.

Among the literary characteristics of the Gospel of Matthew, the five great speeches of Jesus stand out as its most prominent feature.[5] Matthew has assembled Jesus sayings traditions from his source material and thematically edited them into five discourses to form an integral part of the gospel narrative. The Matthean discourses are presented as arising from five different situations in Jesus' public life. A certain incident, or a series of events, set the stage for Jesus' speech.[6] Each discourse is concluded by the formulaic expression, "And when Jesus has finished ...,"[7] reinforcing the narrative sense of the discourse as a continuous teaching of Jesus on a single occasion.

The discourse on community life shares this feature of narrative continuity with the other Matthean discourses. The speech is represented as Jesus' extended response to his disciples' question about greatness in the future kingdom of heaven (18.1). It is set against the immediate

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[5] For other literary features of Matthew's Gospel, see, e.g., Davies and Allison's ICC commentary on Matthew (1988), vol. 1, 72-96.

[6] The parable discourse is the least specific in terms of concrete event(s) that lead(s) to Jesus' speech. Apparently, it needs to be inferred that the situations which prompted Jesus to utter this "parabolic speech" is the general failure of Israel's response to his preaching, as depicted in Mt 11-12.

[7] Mt 7.28; 11.1; 13.53; 19.1; 26.1

backdrop of the temple-tax episode (17.24-27), and within the broader narrative context it forms part of the *conflict* between Jesus and his disciples in their evaluative points of view (16.13-20.28).

This narrative feature of the community discourse thus calls for an interpretation which understands the speech of Jesus as it is related to its narrative context, especially in the light of the portrayal of the disciples in their failure of discipleship.

A second narrative feature of the community discourse concerns a peculiar contextual incoherence. Time and again Jesus touches on matters which are alien to the life situations of the disciples narrated in the Gospel and are thus beyond their present field of vision.[8] On the other hand, these sayings are pertinent to situations of the post-Easter Christian community. This narrative incoherence therefore imparts a referential character to the discourse;

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[8] On the Sermon on the Mount, cf. Mt 5.11,13-16; 7.15-23; on the missionary discourse, cf. 10.16-23; the parable discourse, cf. 13.18-23,36-43. The contextual incongruity of the eschatological discourse is revealed in the disciples' enquiry on the "coming" of Jesus (24.3). Even at this juncture, the disciples in the gospel narrative are not portrayed as coming to understand the purpose of Jesus' mission and his destiny. The world evangelism (24.14) and the thought of awaiting the glorious coming of Jesus from heaven (24.29-3124.36-25.30) are thus beyond the comprehension of the disciples.

This contextual incongruity is recognized by K. Tagawa in a passing remark in his 1969 article: "All the long speeches of Jesus in Matthew are recorded as directly oriented to the Church of Matthew's time" (p. 157 n.2). More recently, see also U. Luz, *Matthew in History* (1994), 41: the discourses "transcend the narrative and address the hearers or readers of the Gospel directly." On further discussion of this aspect of the Matthean discourses, see Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (1988), 107-9, and his article, "Reflection on 'the Reader' of Matthew's Gospel" (1988).

it points to the social world of the first audience. In terms of "readership," in the discourse Jesus is in effect speaking past the disciples in the gospel narrative to *reader(s)* on matters pertaining to the states of affair of the *post-Easter Christian community*.

This contextual incongruity is particularly conspicuous in the community discourse. Thus, the "seeking" of a straying brother in 18.10-20 speaks of a *settled community* whereas the gospel narrative portrays the disciples as constantly on the move with Jesus in his itinerant preaching tour. The disciples are promised experience of some form of "presence" when they are assembled *in his name* (18.20); this speaks of a situation in which Jesus is not physically present with the community of his disciples.[9]

Thus, by its very nature, the discourse on community life has a social dimension, but it is that of a post-Easter Christian community. The discourse may therefore serve as a "window" through which the Matthean community, the original (historical) recipient of Matthew's Gospel, can be partially glimpsed. (Further aspects of this community may be inferred from other parts of the Gospel.) The social, referential dimension of the discourse thus

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[9] The referential nature of the missionary discourse is also appreciated by recent gospel critics. Besides Kingsbury who has pioneered in the narrative-critical studies of Matthew's Gospel (1988:108), see also D.A. Carson (1984:248,250-51), R.A. Edwards (1985:35), D.J. Weaver (1990:15-16,134), D.B. Howell (1990:14-15), W.D. Davies/D.C. Allison (1991:140,158), G.N. Stanton (1992:140, 158), D.E. Garland (1993:110), M. Davies (1993:83-84).

calls for a reading that situates the Gospel in its historical circumstances of origin, and seeks to understand the discourse from the perspectives of the evangelist and his first audience. In the light of a reconstructed socio-historical setting of the Matthean community, the historical reading may be enriched by employing relevant concepts and theories developed in the social sciences.

A third feature of the Matthean discourses concerns a narrational anomaly. In many places, the Matthean discourses presuppose prior knowledge of the narrative posterior to the discourses for comprehending certain parts of Jesus' speech. In the community discourse, Mt 18.5-9 takes on a more viable meaning when the sayings are understood in the light of 25.31-46. Reinforced by the same narrational anomalies in the other discourses,[10] this suggests that the Gospel of Matthew implies a reading which is informed by previous readings of the Gospel. The reader implied (by the discourse) is thus one who is *not* a "virginal" reader.

Fourthly, in addition to the narrative and referential character, the community discourse, like the other four discourses, possesses a redactional character. A synoptic comparison reveals that the community discourse contains parallel sayings of Jesus to that in Mark and Luke. Accepting the majority view of the two-source theory for the literary relationship among the synoptic Gospels, the

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[10] See the appendix for discussion of this narrational anomaly of the other four Matthean discourses.

community discourse therefore entails a redaction-critical study. A redaction-critical reading then presupposes an authorial intention which is manifested in the evangelist's redactional activity as perceived in the synoptic comparisons.

The community discourse therefore possesses a literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific dimension, and it calls for readings from these three perspectives.

III. Justification of the Present Study

The pluralistic approach taken here has its initial impetus and insight from Stephen Barton's doctoral thesis submitted to King's College, University of London, in 1991, now published in a revised form as *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (1994). Barton's work represents a deliberate effort to understand the theme of subordination of family ties to discipleship of Jesus in the two synoptic Gospels from a form-, redaction-critical, literary, and sociological perspective.

But unlike Barton's work, this thesis is not motivated by a thematic interest. The present study of the community discourse is concerned with interpretation. Interpretation is understood here in the more restricted, and modern sense. Different from a mere understanding of a text, interpretation presupposes a way of reading the gospel text and thus a reading strategy of picking out textual signs and making sense of them. Thus, the meaning of a narrative

text is based on the interpretative decision of whether the text under study is read allegorically or literally. The understanding of a text also depends on the critical decision of whether to read a text referentially or otherwise.[11]

The selection of the community discourse as the main text for discussion is underlined by the following considerations:

The first reason is the lack of a major study of this Matthean discourse. Apart from William G. Thompson's comprehensive study, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community: Mt 17.22-18.35*, published in 1970, there has not been a major study of the community discourse in almost three decades. Although W.D. Davies and A.C. Allison discuss Matthew 18 in detail in their second volume commentary to Matthew's Gospel (1991), their study remains primarily a redaction-critical approach, and has not broken any new ground as far as methodology is concerned.

Thompson's work consists of a two-stage, "vertical" and "horizontal," analysis of the discourse. The former is an analysis of Matthew in terms of Matthew; the latter a comparative study with the parallel materials in Mark and Luke. In Thompson's work, the synoptic comparison ("horizontal analysis"), however, assumes a neutral stance. The synoptic comparison, as Thompson expresses it, is "to determine (1) whether there is a literary contact between

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[11] On "interpretation" in modern literary criticism, see K.M. Newton, *Interpreting the Text* (1990), esp. 1-9.

Matthew and the parallels, (2) which [tradition] is more primitive, and (3) which theory about sources best explains the data."[12]

Our redaction-critical reading of discourse differs from that of Thompson: it assumes the two-source theory as a valid working hypothesis for a redaction-critical study of the community discourse. The literary interpretation of Matthew's community discourse in this thesis is more than a close reading of Matthew 18, as exemplified in Thompson's "vertical analysis." Our literary reading of the community discourse has a narrative quality, based on the interpretative view that the Gospel of Matthew is a narrative telling a story of Jesus.

Another reason for choosing the community discourse for the purpose of examining the interpretative process is that the Matthean discourses, as static scenes consisting primarily of Jesus' teachings, offer the greatest resistance to a literary approach. In the current literary (narrative) interpretation of Matthew's Gospel, the discourses remain on the periphery of scholarly construction of the plot of Matthew's story.[13] Mark

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[12] Thompson 1970:6-7.

[13] See Frank Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel" (1987); W. Carter's construction, "Kernel and Narrative Blocks: The Structure of Matthew's Gospel" (1992), which is a modification of Matera's construction of Matthew's plot, with a different perception of the "kernel" events and narrative blocks. In *Matthew As Story* (1988), chs. 2-4, Kingsbury understands Matthew's narrative as a conflict story. In "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel" (1992), Mark Powell shows a far better grasp of the sense of the story - what Matthew's story of Jesus is all about. But nonetheless in Powell's construction, the Matthean

Powell's words regarding the major discourses is representative:

> The great speeches of Jesus ... must be viewed as serving some subsidiary purpose in the narrative, for they do not define the overall movement of the story.[14]

Although J.D. Kingsbury has included a new chapter on the five discourses in the second edition of his *Matthew As Story* (1988), the brief discussion is centred on the (first) two major narrative features of the Matthean discourses which we have discussed above. The five major speeches of Jesus remain outside of Kingsbury's construction of the plot of Matthew's narrative as a conflict story.[15]

In R.A. Edwards's reading of Matthew's Gospel (1985) the five discourses are not related at all to the portrayal of the disciples. Due to its reader-oriented slant Edwards's emphasis is on the overall impact of Jesus' speeches on the (implied) reader.

D.J. Weaver's literary reading of the missionary discourse exhibits similar problems. As Weaver herself understands it, in a literary approach which views Matthew's Gospel as a "unified story",'it is necessary to look at any given section or element of that story above

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discourses remain on the periphery of the plot of the gospel story.

[14] Powell 1990:46; see also Frank Matera 1987:238.

[15] Kingsbury's "The Plot of Matthew's Story" (1992) is very much a reiteration and summary of the view expressed in his 1988 book. The same position is maintained in Kingsbury's 1993 article, "The Significance of the Cross Within the Plot of Matthew's Gospel."

all in terms of its relationship to the whole."[16] Her reading of the discourse proper, however, does not relate the discourse to the actions of the plot and the characters in the story. Consequently, her literary reading of Mt 9.35-11.1 (and, in fact, the entire Gospel) is filled with narrative-critical terms, but does not differ in essence from a close reading of Matthew.[17]

Despite the perception that the discourses form an integral part of the narrative, Jesus' speeches are treated as a relatively isolated phenomenon in the narrative flow of the gospel story. In the work of Rhoads and Michie (1982), Kingsbury (1988), Culpepper (1983), narrative criticism has produced a "poetic" for understanding the dynamics of the gospel story in terms of characters, setting, plot, and (narrative) rhetoric. But how would such poetics contribute, if at all, to the interpretation of the discourses? In other words, would appreciation of Matthew's Gospel as a "unified story" enrich our understanding of the discourse? The literary reading of the community discourse in this thesis seeks to address this problem. In recognizing that the community discourse (like other discourses) forms an integral part of the narrative flow of the story, the literary approach takes the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples as a crucial clue to the interpretation of the discourse.

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[16] Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse* (1990), 25-26.

[17] See D.E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (1993), 109-19, on his close reading of the missionary discourse.

Thirdly, as Jesus' teaching on Christian community life, the community discourse has an inherent social aspect. The discourse exhibits (as we have seen above) a referential character, pointing to a Christian community outside of the gospel text. The discourse thus calls for a reading which situates the text in the historical context of the intention of the gospel author, and that of its reception by the first recipients. The social dimension of the discourse also encourages a reading through concepts and theory from social sciences. As far as is known to the present writer, there has not been a systematic and detailed study of the entire community discourse from a social-scientific perspective.[18]

Since the community discourse has both a historical and literary dimension, different approaches are necessary in order to attune to the text's various aspects. By attending to the various different aspects of the text, an interpreter will be more appreciative of both the literary and historical meaning inherent in the discourse. And through approaching the gospel text from different perspectives, the interpreter will also gain better insights into the nature and process of textual interpretation.

In the following paragraphs we shall outline the literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific approach in this thesis.

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[18] In A.J. Saldarini's *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (1994), the community discourse is not the main Matthean text under study; different parts of the discourse are picked up and discussed in relation to different facets of the community.

IV. A Pluralistic Approach

Any reader or interpreter reads a text with some explicit or implicit presuppositions and "ideology." The literary reading adopted here views Matthew's Gospel as a narrative telling a story of Jesus. In attending to the narrative dimension of the community discourse, our literary approach employs the narrative concepts of characterization and plot. Accordingly, the sayings of Jesus in the discourse take on their meaning as they are perceived in relation to the actions of Jesus and his disciples portrayed in the gospel narrative.

The act of reading will be guided by the construction of the narrative context in which the community discourse is set and by the perception of "narrative gaps" in the discourse. The bridging of these "textual blanks" leads to a perception of meaning primarily through the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples. The literary reading is here based on a form of reader-response reading as theorized in Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978). In short, the literary approach in this thesis is essentially a combined narrative and reader-response reading.

Our social-scientific interpretation is a reading by a modern reader who attempts to understand the community discourse from the perspectives of the evangelist and his first audience. It is therefore a historical interpretation which examines the authorial meaning of the text, and a construction of how the original audience would have

appropriated the words of Jesus in the discourse.

The employment of relevant concepts and theories from the social sciences is guided by the nature of the community discourse. The community dimension of the discourse calls for the employment of the notion of group boundaries. A concept of group boundaries from cultural anthropology is found useful in describing the "boundaries" of the Matthean community, namely, the concept of group boundaries which consist of a "public" and "private" face. In the light of our reconstruction of the Matthean community, our social-scientific interpretation also employs concepts and perspectives related to social deviance, speech accommodation theory, and social-psychology of group belonging.

Little needs to be said concerning the redaction-critical reading adopted here. In this thesis the majority view of the synoptic two-source theory is accepted as the working hypothesis. Our redaction-critical reading will be confined to synoptic comparisons; it will not consider the "theology" and "concerns" of the evangelist that motivate the writing of the Gospel. Redaction-criticism as practised in this thesis therefore has a prominent "literary" quality, but it is nevertheless historical in that it is concerned with the meaning as intended by the gospel writer, and the reception by the original audience.

The literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific approaches will be discussed in details in chapters 2-4 below. Chapter 5 examines the literary context

of the community discourse. The interpretation of the discourse in chapters 6-9 will begin with a literary reading, followed by redaction-critical, and then social-scientific readings.

Perhaps a few words are necessary regarding the presentation of the readings in this order. The order reflects both the hermeneutic conviction, beliefs and interests of the present writer. With Robert Morgan, I believe that in biblical interpretation, the nature of the biblical texts and the interests and concerns of the interpreter form the two poles of interpretation.[19] As a religious text (forming part of the canon for the community of Christian faith), the Gospel ought to be read above all from the interpreter's *present* context: what does the Gospel mean for the reader here and now?[20]

As Matthew's Gospel shows signs of being a story,[21] the community discourse ought to be read in the light of its relationship to the various narrative elements, without raising the question of "authorial intention." Since Matthew's Gospel (like other synoptic Gospels) is episodic in character, the gospel text possesses a potential of meaning - there is a variety of ways of perceiving

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[19] Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (1988), 212-13, 257. On discussions of interpretative interests, see Mark Brett, "Four or Five Things to do with Texts" (1990).

[20] We shall see in ch. 2 on literary reading that the implied reader is a disciple-reader.

[21] On Matthew's Gospel as a story, see discussion in ch. 2 below.

plausible relationships between different parts of the narrative. It is therefore extremely difficult to discern the textual connections intended by the author and hence the authorial meaning, or even a plausible authorial meaning. This can best be determined when there is an external written source indicating such intention. Thus a redaction-critical reading follows the literary reading.

As the Gospel of Matthew also shows signs of referentiality, especially in the discourses, it is also a legitimate interpretative task to present a construction of the possible intention of the gospel writer ("authorial meaning") from a close reading of Matthew's text, assisted by relevant concepts and perspectives from modern social sciences. In our social-scientific reading we also attempt to construct how the original audience of Matthew's Gospel would have appropriated the community discourse in its socio-historical circumstances. Since the significance of social-scientific interpretation (for the present writer) lies primarily in historical interest, and because of the speculative nature of the construction of "historical meaning" in our social-scientific interpretation, both from the perspectives of the evangelist and the original audience, it is perhaps best to start with the literary and redaction-critical readings, and leave the historical questions at the last stage of our pluralistic approach to Matthew's community discourse.

PART I

Delineating the Method

Chapter 2

A LITERARY READING OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

In a recent work, the Oxford New Testament scholar Robert Morgan writes concerning textual interpretation:

> Texts, like dead men and women, have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose. If interpreters choose to respect an author's intentions, that is because it is in their interest to do so. ... They are reading a particular text on the assumption that the author is worth hearing and therefore respect authorial intention. ....
> Any suggestion that a text has rights is a deception concealing someone else's interest. ....
> Interpreters interpret. It is they who are the active subjects in the act of interpretation. The texts are inert objects. ... In interpretation an active mind picks up the signals, then sorts and make sense of them.[1]

These words reflect a current trend in biblical scholarship, a shift in interpretative interests from the historical to the literary dimensions of the biblical texts, from the author to text itself (in its final canonical form) and to the reader, from locating meaning in author's intention to seeking meaning in the reading process. This change in "paradigm," or interpretative framework in biblical studies corresponds roughly, if somewhat belatedly, to developments in recent literary criticism; a move away from, and critique of, "expressive realism" to its response in New Criticism, the rise in structuralism, post-Structuralism, and a variety of reader

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[1] Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (1988), 7; see also pp. 13, 269-70. Chs. 1,2,6 and 8 are written by Morgan.

reception theories.[2] In New Testament studies this change in interpretative perspective is particularly prominent in gospel criticism (and Acts) which witnesses the emergence of a complex array of "literary" approaches to establish itself alongside the traditional historical criticism.[3]

I. Defining a Literary Approach

Literary approaches in recent gospel criticism generally proceed in four main directions and produce a text-centred or a reader-oriented reading, encompassed under the labels of narrative criticism, structuralism, reader-response criticism, and deconstruction. Common to the various approaches is the conspicuous absence of the author of a text as the determining factor in interpretation.[4]

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[2] See, e.g., Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," "From Work to Text" in *Image, Music, Text* (Etr. 1977); Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), ch. 6; Stanley Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*" (1976). See also the variety of interpretative approaches discussed in K.M. Newton, *Interpreting the Text* (1990), Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), Jefferson and Robey (eds), *Modern Literary Theory* (1986), A.C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (1992).

[3] See Morgan/Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (1988), ch. 7, Janice Anderson/Stephen Moore, *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (1992), Stephen Moore *et al*, *The Postmodern Bible* (1995). In *A Gospel for a New People* (1992), ch. 3, Graham Stanton has made a number of constructive and insightful comments on recent "literary" approaches to the Gospels. See also L. Chouinard, "Changing Paradigms for Interpreting the Gospels" (1993). For a theological assessment, see Francis Watson, "Literary Approaches to the Gospels:A Theological Assessment" (1996).

[4] See. e.g., E.V. McKnight's remark in his The Bible and the Reader (1985): "The thesis of this book is that readers make sense. ... a meaning is discovered or created that is satisfying for the present location of the reader"

In the following paragraphs, I shall define and describe the term "literary" interpretation (or reading) as it will be used in this thesis.

In the present study literary interpretation of Matthew's Gospel is both a narrative and a reader-response reading of the Gospel as a story of Jesus. The combined approach draws upon a way of reading from narrative criticism and a form of reader-response criticism. This combination of narrative and reader-response criticism in gospel studies has recently been employed by D.B. Howell in his work, *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (1990), who uses "selected aspects of narrative criticism and a type of reader-response criticism" to describe Matthew's narrative rhetoric in order to understand better the "inclusive" nature of the gospel narrative (p. 17). But the interpretation of a *specific text* in the Gospel of Matthew through a combined narrative/reader-response criticism has not been undertaken by biblical scholars inclined towards a literary approach to the Gospels.[5]

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(12). See Stephen Moore *et al*, *The Postmodern Bible* (1995), chs. 1-3. The authors provide a review of these four literary approaches in gospel criticism and offer an evaluation and critique of these interpretative approaches.

[5] In his *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (1985), R.A. Edwards's reading of Matthew's Gospel as narrative is essentially a reader-oriented reading of the Gospel. D.J. Weaver's reading of Matthew's missionary discourse (1990) is a *sequential* reading of the gospel text (p. 31), but her interpretation of the main text (9.35-11.1) lacks a narrative character - her reading of the text is not related to the narrative elements such as characterization, plot, and setting. See also J.P. Heil's *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus* (1991), and "The Narrative Roles of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy" (1991). E.S. Malbon's reading of Mark 4.1-8.26 (in "Narrative Criticism: How Does

Since accounts of narrative criticism[6] are available elsewhere,[7] I shall dispense with an introductory account of the "method." Suffice to note here that narrative criticism is essentially the transference of narratology to the studies of Gospels and Acts as narratives.[8] The point of departure of narrative criticism is that the Gospels are viewed as unified or coherent narratives, each telling a story of Jesus with its own plot; it studies the narrative elements of characters, events, setting, plot, point of view, and rhetorical techniques ("narrative rhetoric").[9]

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the Story Mean?" [1992]) represents a truly narrative/ reader-response reading of the Markan text. But her reading is a *sequential* reading, to be distinguished from the *non-sequential* reading in the following literary study of Matthew's community discourse.

[6] The term "narrative criticism" was introduced by David Rhoads in his "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark (1982), 411-12.

[7] See D. Rhoads's 1982 article; Mark Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (1990). For critical review of narrative criticism, see Stephen Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (1989), 3-68; Stephen Moore *et al*, The Postmodern Bible (1995), 111-12.

[8] Gospel narrative critics draw on works from such literary theorists as Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (1978); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Etr. 1980); Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Etr. 1973); Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Etr. 1968); E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1954); Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); Robert Scholes/Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (1966); Susan Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (1981).

[9] See D. Rhoads 1982:412-13. The works of Rhoads/ Michie, *Mark As Story* (1982), J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (1988), and R.A. Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983) have produced a "gospel poetics." As a "text immanent" approach emphasizing on the autonomy of the narrative world and the inseparability of content and form, narrative criticism has a marked affinity to the Anglo-American New Criticism. See Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (1989), 9-12.

Reader-response criticism is also a close reading of texts.[10] As practised by biblical scholars, gospel reader-response criticism takes the form of a chronological reading, stressing the reader's moment by moment reading experience of anticipation, adjustment, and retrospection as the reader progresses temporally through the text.[11] The reading strategy thus presupposes a reader who comes to the Gospel for the first time.[12]

The particular narrative/reader-response approach adopted in the present study will be discussed in the following pages. In section I of this chapter, it will be shown that the interpretative decision to look at Matthew's

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[10] In modern literary theory, "reader-response criticism" has tended to become an umbrella term for a variety of interpretative approaches which emphasize the text-reader relationship and reading process. Thus the editors (Suleiman and Crosman) of *The Reader in the Text* (1980) have embraced a notion of *generalized* reader-oriented criticism to include in their collection of essays phenomenology, hermeneutics, rhetorical criticism, semiotic, structuralism, sociological/historical criticism, and psychoanalytic criticism. See also Jane Tompkins (ed), *Reader-Response Criticism* (1980).

[11] For an introductory account of biblical reader-response criticism, see, e.g., James Ressequie, "Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels" (1984); Robert Fowler, "Who is the Reader in Reader Response Criticism" (1985), "Reader-Response Criticism" (1992); J.M. Bassler, "The Parable of the Loaves" (1986). For a reader-oriented reading of Matthew's Gospel, see R.A. Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (1985), "Uncertain Faith: Matthew's Portrait of the Disciples" (1985), "Characterization of the Disciples as a Feature of Matthew's Narrative" (1992).

[12] This biblical version of reader-response criticism, which emphasizes a first-time, sequential reading, is heavily indebted to the reader criticism of Wolfgang Iser ("The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach [1972)] The Act of Reading [1978]), and that of earlier Stanley Fish ("Literature in the Reader: An Affective Stylistics" [1970]).

Gospel as a "coherent" narrative of the story of Jesus imparts a new direction for understanding the community discourse. The literary reading acquires a narrative character in its relating the community discourse to the portrayals of Jesus and his disciples. Section II sets out the general direction of literary interpretation adopted in this thesis: a reading from the story and narrative levels. That is, the discourse will be read from the perspective of the disciples in the gospel narrative, and from the reader's. In section III, I shall explain the meaning of "reader" in our literary reading. Finally, the reading strategy will be explained in section IV.

II. The Gospel as the Story of Jesus and Literary Interpretation

As a selective narrative account of the life of Jesus presenting his deeds and teaching in anecdotal succession within a rough chronological framework from birth (divine origin) to his death and resurrection, the Gospel of Matthew resembles formally the biographies (βίοι) of the ancient Graeco-Roman world.[13] But as a "life of Jesus" the gospel narrative in effect tells a story of Jesus. If a narrative is distinguished by the twin characteristics of a "story" and a "story-teller,"[14] the narrative character

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[13] New Testament scholars who advocate situating the genre of canonical Gospels within the Graeco-Roman biographical traditions include C.H. Talbert (1977; 1988), Philip Schuler (1982), R.A. Burridge (1992), G.N. Stanton (1992:59-84; 1992a), Perry V. Kea (1994).

[14] R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), 4,240. In his *Story and Discourse* (1978), Seymour Chatman expresses the conception of narrative in slightly

of Matthew's Gospel is evidenced in the presence of a narrator's voice telling the story of Jesus and at times addressing the reader through commentaries[15]and explanatory glosses;[16] in fact, the narrating voice is heard from the very beginning of the Gospel in the tracing of Jesus' (human) genealogy through the Davidic royal lineage (1.1-17).[17]

Despite its episodic character, the Gospel acquires the essence of a coherent or unified narrative through an overarching theme, which orders and shapes the Jesus tradition into a well-plotted story.[18] The characterization

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different terms: a narrative consists of a story and a discourse - how the story is expressed (pp. 19,26,147). In confining himself to third-person narration, Frederick J. Ruf ("The Consequences of Genre" [1994]), has elaborated on the character of the narrative voice as a single "overarching voice" that encompasses all persons and actions *from without the story*.

[15] Cf. the narrator's voice in the fulfillment quotations of the Old Testament: Mt 1.22f; 2.15, 17f, 23; 4.14-16; 8.17; 12.17-21; 13.35; 21.4f; 27.9f.

[16] Cf. Mt 1.23b; 27.33b, 46c. Other direct address to reader/hearer: 24.15; 27.8; 28.15.

[17] The narrative character of the canonical Gospels has long been recognized. Here we only note the New Testament scholars who are concerned with the genre of the gospels for their interpretation, but do not approach the gospels using modern literary insights and theories: e.g., R. Guelich (1983:213,217; cf. 207), C.H. Talbert (1988:69), Graham Stanton (1992b:1193,1195). See also M.D. Hooker in her commentary on Mark (1991:32). On Matthew's Gospel, see, esp. U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (1989), 39-44 and n. 42. Luz's appreciation of Matthew's Gospel as a narrative is particularly shown in his *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (1995), which represents his attempt to construct the theology of Matthew's Gospel as a story of Jesus.

[18] See also Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol 1 (1986), 1-3, 8-9. According to Tannehill, the narrative unity of Luke-Acts is obtained through a dominant theme (the universal purpose of God and its

of both Jesus and the other major character groups is subordinate to the plotting theme of the narrative.[19] We shall discuss in chapter 5 below the plotting theme, or the organizing principle, of Matthew's Gospel.

So while the (Graeco-Roman) biographical aspects of Matthew's Gospel are recognized, a literary approach's emphasis on the Gospel as a story with a plot results in a shift in the perception of the function of the Gospel. Instead of functioning, as in biographies, to reveal or defend the true "essence" of Jesus ("what sort of person Jesus is"), or to legitimate the authority, beliefs and values of the community of Jesus,[20] Matthew's Gospel tells a story of Jesus in order to communicate a way of life for adoption by its readers or hearers. Through the story, the narrator aims to persuade his reader or readers to live the way of righteousness which would enable them to combat the perverting influence of the Evil One, both on the

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fulfillment in the life and death of Jesus) which unifies the narrated events into a story. For Gospel of Mark, see Norman Petersen, "The Point of View in Mark's Narrative" (1978); Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology" (1980). See also Mark Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (1992), ch. 3 ("Genre"); Stibbe embraces the Fourth Gospel as a type of Graeco-Roman biography and as a plotted story.

[19] See C. Clifford Black, "Depth of Characterization and Degree of Faith in Matthew" (1989), esp. 607-12. Black embraces Mary Springer's notion of characterization as serving the governing principle of a literary work (*A Rhetoric of Character* [1978], ch. 1). See also Kingsbury, "The Rhetoric of Comprehension in the Gospel of Matthew" (1995), putting forth the thesis that characterization in Matthew serves the purpose of persuasion.

[20] See D.E. Aune 1988:35 (n.41), C.H. Talbert 1988:57-59, R. Burridge 1992:149-52, G.N. Stanton 1992:69-70; Kea 1994:583-86.

individual and communal level.[21]

Taking Matthew's Gospel as a story of Jesus, a literary approach will seek to integrate the parts of the text as closely as possible to the whole, and to understand individual parts in their relations to other parts and to the whole of the text of the Gospel.[22] In fact, as we have seen in chapter 1, the Matthean discourses are portrayed as forming part of the narrative flow. In the words of Janice Anderson, the discourses are an "integral part of the Gospel as narrative ... not simply repositories of teaching in the midst of an independent story."[23]

A literary approach thus seeks to make sense of the discourse on community life by viewing it as an integral part of the gospel story. Secondly, the literary reading acquires a *narrative* character when the discourse is understood not only in its narrative context but also in terms of the narrative elements such as characters, setting, point of view, and plot of the gospel story. In the literary reading in the study to follow, the portrayals of Jesus and his disciples are regarded as contributory factors to the meaning of the discourse. Our literary interpretation therefore embodies the formalist "organic unity" of content and form.

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[21] See ch. 5 for the discussion of the plot of Matthew's Gospel.

[22] See Francis Watson, "Literary Approaches to the Gospels: A Theological Assessment" (1996).

[23] Anderson, "Matthew: Sermon and Story" (1988), 506. Anderson's remark is appropriate not only for the Sermon on the Mount but also for other discourses as well.

III. Reading A Story: Two Levels of Understanding

As we have noted in the introductory chapter, the community discourse displays a material incongruence with its narrative context. In a substantial part of the speech, Jesus speaks on matters which are beyond the purview of the disciples in the narrative, as they are relevant only to the life situations of a post-Easter Christian community. The discourse thus presupposes the *reader's perspective*: Jesus is speaking past the disciples in the gospel narrative to the reader.

The disciples (in the narrative) might understand Jesus' words differently from the reader, or might not comprehend at all. The community discourse (and the other four discourses as well) are, however, not the only instances in the Gospel in which the reader understands more than the supposed audience ("disciples") in the Gospel. There are indeed particular episodes in Matthew's Gospel concerning Jesus' identity which suggest two levels of reading,[24] the reading of the reader and that of the characters in the story, and that the former understands more than the latter.[25] This is because the reader has

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[24] Cf. Mt 8.23-27 (Jesus stilling of the storm), 14.22-33 (another instance of storm stilling); 16.16 (Peter's confession); 27.51-54 (the soldiers' confession at Jesus' cross), and Jesus' command to silence (8.4; 9.30; 12.15f; 16.20; 17.9).

[25] On a similar narrative reading which distinguishes the understanding of the (implied) reader and that of the characters in the story world, see Timothy Cargal, "His Blood be Upon Us and Upon our Children: A Matthean Double Entendre?" (1991). Cargal makes a distinction between two levels of narration: the first-level narrative conveys the narrator's point of view to the implied reader; the second

access to information provided in the narrative asides that are "hidden" from the characters in the story. Consequently, these events evoke a different response from the reader who perceives that the events have a different meaning for him/her than for the human characters in the story.[26]

It is, however, the Matthean discourses which highlight the two levels of reading. In addition to possessing knowledge not available to the disciples (given by the narrator), the reader has an overview of the portrayal of the disciples and is thus able to perceive the discourse from the wider angle of the disciples' actions. In contrast, because the disciples themselves constitute part of the ongoing events in the story world, they come to understand the discourse in relative isolation. This is due to the human inability simultaneously to recall distant events and words of Jesus and to appreciate their

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level is the narrative of the story and the points of view conveyed are that of the characters in the narrative.

[26] On the interpretation of 8.23-27, Davies and Allison (1991:69-70) indicate an appreciation of two levels of reading. See also D.A. Carson 1991:162 who similarly distinguishes Nathanael's understanding of Jesus as the Son of God from that of the reader of John's Gospel (1.49).

Contra Davies/Allison 1991:510; Kingsbury 1988:89-90; Heil 1991:86-88, on the title "Son of God," the reader has a deeper understanding of Jesus as the "Son of God" (cf. 1.20,22; 3.13-16) than the disciples in the boat (14.33), Peter (16.16), and the centurion and his soldiers (27.54) in their respective "confession." Furthermore, while the Jewish leaders are at a loss to perceive why the messianic son of David should have a high status than David himself (22.41-46), the reader readily understands from the "birth narrative" (cf. 1.18-23). The reader's understanding is superior to the characters' because he/she has access to narrative information which is "hidden" from the disciples, the soldiers, and the Jewish authorities.

significance for the present discourse. Their comprehension is further interfered with by the contextual incongruity and the temporal anomaly of the discourses.[27] The disciples' limited comprehension of the discourses is indeed part of the Gospel's overall portrayal of the disciples who, *without* Jesus' explanation, do not come to understand the significance of Jesus' words and deeds.[28]

Thus, our literary reading of the community discourse will consist of two parts: the understanding of the disciples in the story level and the comprehension of the reader on the narrative level. The comparison and contrast of the two readings will shed fresh light on the process of interpretation of the community discourse.

IV. Who is the Reader in the Literary Reading?

It is necessary at this point to make an initial clarification of the meaning of "reader" in *our* literary reading. It will become clear that the definition of reader embodies the reading strategy that will be followed in the interpretation of the community discourse in this study. First of all, it is important to note that the "reader" of Matthew's Gospel in our literary reading is a *modern* reader, to be distinguished from the (historical) first

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[27] See in ch. 1 discussion of these two narrative feature.

[28] This is clearest in the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' predictions of his suffering and death, not learning any thing from them: 16.22-23; 17.22-23; 20.20-24, and their apparent disillusion at Jesus in their forsaking him at his arrest (26.47-56).

recipients of Matthew's Gospel, commonly identified as members of the "Matthean community." The reader's reading experience is therefore different from the "responses" of the first recipients in at least the following two respects:

(1) The reading experience differs from that of *listening*. In ancient Graeco-Roman world reading aloud was the normal practice of reading; the original receivers (the Matthean community) would most probably listen to Matthew's Gospel being read to them, and most likely not the whole Gospel but only sections of it as time permitted in their gatherings.[29] For a modern reader reading silently in private, the pace of reading is under his/her control and there is the obvious freedom to flip pages for reference and time for retrospection. In contrast, such "luxurious" privileges (availability of reference and time) are generally lacking for listeners in public reading, with the consequence that the text listened to is perceived and understood most probably in isolation from the rest of the gospel narrative.[30]

(2) Needless to say, the modern reader is situated in

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[29] The use of formulaic phrases, inclusio and triad of different kinds may indicate Matthew's Gospel originally intended to be read orally and in sections demarcated by "structural markers" through these stylistic features. On public reading in early Christian assemblies, see Justin, *Apology* I, 67.

[30] In his *A Gospel for a New People* (1992), 73-76, Graham Stanton has similarly called attention to the gap separating reading experience between silent reading of modern readers and oral delivery of the gospel narrative to the original audience of the Gospel.

a socio-historical and cultural context widely different from that of the original audience, and the responses to the gospel narrative evoked, including the perception of the meaning of the text, would be quite different accordingly. The reading of the first recipients of Matthew's Gospel will be discussed in the sociological reading in chapter 4.

But the modern reader does stand on common ground with the original recipients of the Gospel. To understand the language of the Gospel and the socio-political, cultural, and economic codes in the gospel story, the reader needs to possess a working knowledge of koine Greek and of first-century Judaism (including its religious writings) in Palestine.[31]

Secondly, following Wayne Booth,[32] Wolfgang Iser[33] and some other literary critics, the reader in view is the one who takes on the *role* of a "reader" envisaged or implied by

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[31] E.g. the currencies of "denarii" and "talent" (Mt 18.24,28; 20.9; 22.19), the Syrian "stater" (27.27), the political situations of the Jewish people implied in 2.19-23; 14.1-12; 27.1-2,15; the Jewish piety of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6.1-6,16-18), and the tradition of "hand washing" before meal (15.1-2), the belief of the coming of Elijah before the messiah (17.9-13), the Jewish half-shekel tax (17.24).

[32] *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983), 137-44.

[33] *The Act of Reading* (1978), 34-35. See also Iser's response to Booth concerning the implied reader in Diacritics 10(1980), 54-74, esp. 70. As we shall see below, Iser's version of implied reader is rooted both in the text and in the actual reader, differing from Booth's implied reader who is essentially defined solely by the text.

the text.[34] This "reader" may be construed from the text to commit himself/herself to the beliefs and values of the implied author.[35] Thus a modern reader would need to assume the role of the "reader" implied in the text if he/she is to understand properly the work, albeit only partially in practice as the divorce between one's true self and the self one is willing to become during reading can never be complete. This "reader" (as a reader's role) is the implied reader as conceived by Booth in his discussion of the problem of "beliefs" and "truth" in fiction.[36]

But apart from taking on the beliefs and values implied in the text, the implied reader is also rooted in a narrative text in another important respect: he/she is "created" by the structure of the text, what Iser calls the structure of narrative gaps which constitute the reader's (cognitive) interaction with the text. In Iser's words: the implied reader is "a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him."[37] For Iser the structure of the text is such that it sets the parameters for reading without prescribing them. The text thus presents a potential of meaning. Because of

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[34] See also W. Daniel Wilson, "Readers in Texts" (1981); Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fictions: A Reexamination of Audiences" (1977).

[35] The implied author - the author's "second self," is first coined by Wayne Booth (1983:151; see also 70-77,137).

[36] Booth 1983:137-44,428-29.

[37] *The Act of Reading* (1978), 34; see also pp. 163-79 on the delineation of "narrative gaps" perceived and filled in by the implied reader.

the actual readers' different dispositions and social locations, there is a range of possibilities for filling in the narrative gaps.[38] Each individual reading thus represents an actualization of the potential meaning of the text.

Iser's implied reader thus cannot be identified simply as a "reader in the text"; he/she may be thought of as being located in the mind of the actual reader and called into being in the reading process.[39] As Iser himself expresses it, the term

> "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process - which will vary historically from one age to another - and not a typology of possible readers."[40]

As the reading process is the interaction between text and reader, the implied reader is, then, rooted both in the text and in the real reader. This is the "implied reader" in view in our literary reading of Matthew's Gospel.

Thirdly, the gospel narrative implies a reader who is a disciple of Jesus (hence embodying Christian beliefs and

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[38] Iser, The Act of Reading (1978), 34-38; see also Iser's reply to Wayne Booth's question on his conception of implied reader in *Diacritics* 10(1980), esp. 70-71. Iser's implied reader may be considered as the development of the notion of implied reader first conceived by Booth.

[39] See *Diacritics* 10(1980), 70 (Iser's response to Booth). See also Robert Scholes's review of Iser's *The Implied Reader* (1974) in *Diacritics* 5(1975):13-15.

[40] *The Implied Reader* (1974), xii. See also *The Act of Reading* (1978), 34-35: there are two basic, interrelated aspects of the implied reader: "the reader's role as a textual structure, and the reader's role as a structured act" (p. 35).

values) situated in time after his resurrection. This is indicated in the narrative comments which reflect a narratorial disposition that expects the reader to embrace the expressed perspective.[41] At the various summary statements, the narrating voice reveals the distancing attitude which calls the synagogue ruled by unbelieving Jewish leaders "their synagogues."[42]

But perhaps the most obvious confirmation that the implied reader is a disciple-reader is the discourse feature that Jesus speaks past the audience in the story to the reader: the reader addressed is the disciple who is expected to listen to what Jesus has commanded (cf. 28.19f). This is supported by a narrational feature which has the disciples always address Jesus as "Lord," except for Judas who "betrayed" him (10.4).[43]

Fourthly, the narrational anomalies in the discourses

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[41] Cf. the fulfillment citations that offer the believer's way of understanding Jesus' birth and his acts and words, which the narrator assumes consent of the reader. At Mt 27.15b, the narrator intrudes to comment on the Jewish leaders' polemical story of the disciples of Jesus stealing Jesus' body: "and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day" (RSV). The reader is expected to share the narrator's point of view regarding the continuing unbelief of the Jewish authorities and their "evilness." In Matthew's narrative, the Jewish leaders (as a group) are described as "evil"; see 9.4; 12.34 (cf. 3.7); 22.15-18.

[42] Mt 4.23; 9.35; 12.9; 13.54 (cf. 10.17 placed on Jesus' lips). On further discussion of this narrative stance, see discussion in the social-scientific reading in ch. 4.

[43] In contrast with other disciples, Judas is portrayed addressing Jesus as ῥαββί (26.25,49). Cf. also the two contrasting addresses (διδάσκαλε, κύριε) in 8.18-22 by a scribe and a disciple of Jesus.

(which are discussed in chapter 1)[44] indicate another feature of the implied reader which has crucial implications for interpretation. As we have seen, the narrational anomalies presuppose prior knowledge of later parts of the story. They thus suggest a repeated reading in which the reader is familiar with the story-line and details beyond the discourses. The implied reader is a repeated reader of the gospel narrative conversant with the story-line.

Matthew's narrative thus implies a reader who is a disciple of Jesus with the necessary linguistic and historical competence required by the repertoire of the gospel narrative for its comprehension, and who is not a first-time reader of Matthew's Gospel. The reader of our literary reading is thus the modern reader who actualizes the role of the Matthean implied reader.[45]

V. A Proposed Reading Strategy

Since the Matthean implied reader is not a reader who comes to the Gospel for the first time, his/her reading experience would not be that experienced by a "virginal

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[44] See also the discussion in the appendix.

[45] The readership adopted here is different from M.A. Tolbert's *authorial audience* (or *reader*) as delineated in her work on Mark's Gospel, *Sowing the Gospel* (1989). In Tolbert's words, the literary-historical interpretation "will still be that of a modern person reflecting from a late-twentieth century perspective on what an ancient text might have communicated to an *ancient audience*" (p. 55, italic mine). Our literary interpretation is *not* oriented to the authorial audience, and, as Tobert expresses it, "to develop that meaning in the context of ancient conventions as far as possible ...." (p. 55; see also pp. 52-53).

reader." Admittedly, the reading of a narrative normally takes place in a linear temporal mode. But as the implied reader is not a first-time reader, he/she would not normally perceive in the reading the twists and turns of the story, as would a reader who reads Matthew's Gospel for the first time. In describing the temporal reading experience, Wolfgang Iser writes: "We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectation, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation."[46] For a non-virginal reader of Matthew's Gospel already conversant with the story-line, the Iserian temporal reading is unlikely to be the kind of reading experience felt in a repeated reading of the Gospel. In this respect, our reading of Matthew's Gospel differs from the sequential, "virginal" reading commonly adopted by biblical reader-oriented critics.[47] It is *not* concerned with "analyzing" a reading experience of having expectation confirmed or sometimes surprised by the gospel text.

Our literary approach is rather the appropriation of Iser's other facet of literary reading. According to Iser's reception theory, a text presents a structure of "narrative gaps," and proper comprehension consists in the "filling in" of these gaps by relating the apparently disconnected

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[46] Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1972), 293.

[47] This temporal reader-oriented reading is exemplified in W.H. Kelber (1985), R. Fowler (1981), and E.S. Malbon's (1992) readings of Mark's Gospel, and in R.A. Edwards's reading of Matthew's Gospel (1985).

segments of the text.[48]

The episodic character of the Gospel of Matthew makes the Gospel a suitable text adaptable to this Iserian mode of reading. Although there are in Matthew's Gospel temporal and transitional phrases which have the effect of imparting to the story a sense of progression and continuity,[49] events in Matthew's Gospels are often loosely connected without clear indications of their causal or thematic links. Numerous "gaps," created by juxtaposition of apparently unconnected events,[50] need to be filled out (by the reader) in order to come to a proper understanding of the sense of the story.

A literary approach to Matthew's Gospel therefore seeks a close integration of the various parts into a whole and to understand a part in its relation to other relevant parts. While concerned with a literary interpretation of Mark's Gospel, E.S. Malbon's words are relevant for our

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[48] See Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), esp. chs. 7-8.

[49] Cf. the use of τότε ("then") in 2.7; 3.13; 4.1; 9.14; 11.20; 12.22,38; 14.22; 17.19; 20.21; 23.1. On chronological links, most often temporal phrases, cf. "in those days" (3.1); "at that time" (11.25, 12.1; 14.1); "in that hour" (18.1; 26.55); "on that day" (13.1; 22.23); "from that time on" (4.17; 16.21). Apart from the transitional expression for the discourses at 7.28; 11.1; 13.53; 191.1; 26.1, see also 9.9,27,32; 12.9; 15.29.

[50] Apart from the narrative gap between Mt 17.22-23 and 24-27, and between 17.27 and 18.1, see also, e.g., 2.23 and 3.1; 4.17 and 4.18; 11.1 and 11.2; 11.25-30 and 12.1ff; Mt 12 and 13.1-52; 20.28 and 20.29-34. Note also the thematic gaps created in the succession of events depicted in Mt 8-9, such as Jesus' stilling of the storm (8.23-27), the controversy about fasting and mourning (9.14-17) among the various healing episodes, and Jesus calling the scribes "evil" (9.4).

interpretation of Matthew's narrative as well:

> *How* does the text mean? This question is literary; it represents a search for internal meaning rather than external (or referential) meaning. How do various literary patterns enable the text to communicate meaning to its hearers and readers? How do interrelated characters, settings, and actions of the plot contribute to a narrative's meaning for a reader?[51]

In particular our literary reading of the community discourse will seek to relate the discourse to the flow of the story. Since the community discourse is concerned with the proper behaviour and relationship in a Christian community ("humility"), a literary approach aims to see how the theme of humility is incorporated in the story through the actions of the major characters. Our literary reading is therefore concerned with (1) locating the community discourse in its narrative context: the discourse's temporal and thematical relation to other events, and (2) how Jesus' words in the discourse are related to the characterization of Jesus and the disciples - hence to make sense of Jesus' words in the light of the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples.

The bridging of the narrative gaps will be operative in two directions. First, the perception of the gaps and the bridging of them will be guided by the characterization of Jesus and his disciples through their words and action. Secondly, as both the community discourse and the parable discourse are narrated within the plot of Jesus' conflict

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[51] Malbon 1992:24, emphasis original. It is to be noted that Malbon's narrative interpretation is dictated by a sequential reading.

with Israel (12.1-20.34), it is not inconceivable that some sayings in the parable discourse concerning situations in the community of disciples may shed some light on the understanding of the discourse on the community life. This reading strategy will receive concrete illustrations in our literary reading of the community discourse in the chapters below.

Our literary reading adopted here is thus textually constrained in the sense that it is regulated by the structure of narrative gaps. But the textual blanks are such that their "filling" is not prescribed but open to the potential of differing ways of closing the "gaps" implied in the text. A particular reading is thus a way of realizing the potential meaning of the text, partly analogous to the measuring process which causes the "collapse" of a mixed quantum state of a (bounded) physical system to one of its eigenstates.

The implied reader is thus essentially a roundabout way of referring to a particular interpretative strategy. In our case, our implied reader is an Iserian reader who interacts with the text through the narrative gaps perceived in the narrative. This reader is, however, distinguished by being a disciple-reader who is a non-virginal reader.

The referential character of the discourses also suggests that one should give consideration to the significance of the community discourse as it is related to

the world of the implied reader.[52] We shall show that the significance of the discourse is appreciated through the overall perception of the plot of Matthew's story.

VI. Concluding Remarks

In the literary approach adopted in this thesis, the gospel narrative is conceived of as possessing a potential of meaning because of the presence of the narrative gaps. A reader realizes a plausible meaning of the community discourse through a way of bridging these gaps. The reader is thus assigned a crucial role in the construction of meaning. Our literary reading allows for a different realization of the meaning potential from different readers, and even by the same reader who may come to a different reading in the future! In this epistemological sense, our literary reading is a reader-response type of reading. But it is a particular form of reader-response approach in that its reading is not a first-time, sequential reading.

On the other hand, in significant portions of the community discourse, the bridging of the narrative gaps is facilitated by the characterization of Jesus and the disciples. Furthermore, the perception of the message of the discourse by the reader is obtained by the grasping of the plot of the Gospel. Thus, in its attending to the

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[52] We recall that, in following Iser, implied reader in our literary reading is not a purely "reader in the text" type. The reader is an actual reader whose interpretation of the text is regulated by the structuring of the narrative gaps perceived in the text. See above discussion of reader.

narrative characters of the Gospel, the interpretation is "narrative." Our literary interpretation of the community discourse is therefore a reader-oriented narrative-critical reading. The reading differs from the sequential reading as practised by most gospel critics who embrace a reader-oriented approach to the Gospels. The narrative/reader-response reading in the present study is more akin to Robert Tannehill's "spatial" reading which produces an overall understanding of the gospel text "after reading a second, third or fourth time."[53]

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[53] Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol I (1986), 6. It is worth noting that the earlier Tannehill, in his "Disciples in Mark" (1977), posited a sequential reading performed by a "virginal reader," a reading strategy markedly different from his later work on Luke-Acts.

Chapter 3

A REDACTION-CRITICAL READING OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

I. Redaction Criticism and Textual Meaning

As we have seen in chapter 2, in a thorough-going literary approach to the gospel narratives textual meaning is sought in the internal relations and narrative structures of a Gospel as they are construed by a modern reader without reference to the original context out of which the Gospel came. In this form of literary reading neither the author nor his initial recipients are constitutive of the interpretive horizon of the interpreter. The question is not raised as to whether the meaning construed corresponds in any way to the meaning intended by the evangelist, or how the text would have been understood by the first readers/audience in their historical life setting.

In non-literary approaches, it is precisely the historical questions which engage the attention of the interpreter. Founded upon the theory of *literary* relationship of the synoptic Gospels, namely, the two-document hypothesis, redaction criticism is essentially a historical approach.[1] In their effort to analyze an evangelist's composition and editing process, redaction critics attempt to ascertain the gospel writer's religious

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[1] For a recent careful methodological appraisals of the basic assumptions and working procedure of redaction - criticism, see G.N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People* (1992), ch. 2. See also Morna Hooker, "In his own Image?"

outlook (theological convictions) and to reconstruct from the text the socio-historical context of his community.[2] This complex of personal convictions and external social forces is regarded as the central factor which shapes the evangelist's presentation of Jesus in narrative form.

Regarding the meaning of the gospel text, a historical approach looks for the "original" meaning of the text, the meaning as intended by the evangelist situated in a socio-historical context.[3] The author's intention is the norm of meaning in a historical reading of the Gospel. However, textual interpretation differs from ordinary human conversation in one crucially important aspect. Whereas the speaker's intention can be ascertained in the mutual dialogue of the participants and any ambiguity can be clarified during the conversation, an author's work does not "speak" and "respond" to queries from a reader. By the very nature of *written* communication, the authorial meaning is apprehended by a reader through his/her deliberate act of interpretation: "discerning" the author's meaning in the text is essentially the reader's construction of meaning

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[2] In its concern for better understanding of the evangelist's "theology" and purpose of writing, redaction criticism has developed and extended into what is now known as "composition criticism." This attends to the arrangement of the gospel material and the movement of the narrative, recurrent motifs and themes in the Gospel, rather than simply preoccupying itself with minute analysis of the evangelist's modification of his sources.

[3] Paul Joyce, "First Among Equals? The Historical-Critical Approach in the Marketplace of Methods" (1994). See also James Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (1970), 30-38. Morgan/Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (1988), 10.

which is the product of his/her interaction with the text. Apart from obvious anachronisms, in a reading for the historical meaning of a text a reader is in reality attributing his interpretation of the text to the intention of the author. In general, the plain sense of the text - the meaning of a text by virtue of the rules and conventions of the language in which it is written - can be assumed to represent the author's intended meaning, assuming that the author in following the rules of the language used for his work has adequately represented what he/she has intended to say. Where obscurity or ambiguity is present in the text,[4] interpretation aims to "discover" the meaning which is most likely to be what the author intended to mean for his readers in a particular historical situation.

In textual interpretation, and especially with the first-century text of the New Testament Gospels, a degree of "reading into the text" by the interpreter is inevitable because of the chasm of time, space, and culture separating the reader from the text. At the risk of further blurring the "boundaries" of authorial intention, it is perhaps necessary to extend the scope of authorial intention to embrace the "unattended meaning," which may be regarded as "unconscious implicates of the author's intention," one

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[4] In Matthew's Gospel, see the ambiguity in meaning in the following passages: Jesus "fulfilling" (πληρῶσαι) the law and the prophets (Mt 5.17); John the baptist being "the least in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 11.11); the saying about the coming of the kingdom of heaven and men's response (11.12); Jesus' "least brothers" in 25.31-46; ἔθνος in Mt 21.43 and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in 28.19.

that "the author would have gladly acknowledged, had it been brought to his attention."[5] However, on the basis of the synoptic two-source theory, where there are close Markan parallels redaction criticism offers a reasonably "objective methodology" for discerning Matthean intentionality. Once the composition process of the Gospel of Matthew is understood as the evangelist's selection, arrangement and modifications of the Jesus tradition from his source, it is fruitful and proper to look for authorial intention and to make it the key to textual meaning.[6] In a redaction-critical reading, the plausible meaning of Matthew's Gospel is then located in the "intention" of the evangelist who is responsible for the final form of the

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[5] Nigel Watson, "Authorial Intention - Suspect Concept for Biblical Scholars?" (1987), 10-11. On the expansion of "authorial meaning" to include certain aspects of the verbal meaning not envisaged even by the author, see E.D. Hirsch, "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted" (1984), which is the author's major revision of his earlier position as expressed in his "Objective Interpretation" (1960). Hirsch has revised his earlier conception of authorial meaning to include various fulfilments of the author's intention so that certain "applications" can be part of the original intention.

[6] In his "Reading the Bible as Literature: Two Questions for Biblical Critics" (1987), John Barton called attention to the role of writers and the intended use of extended narrative works in the Old Testament such as the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles of ancient Israel. This cannot be assumed to share the modern western social and literary conventions in the writing of narrative and its reading by individuals in private. Barton suggests that crucial to one's interpretation of biblical narratives is the judgment of asking what *kind* of meaning is fruitful and proper to the biblical text. But on the basis of the Markan priority, Matthew's redactional activities can be detected throughout his Gospel (in selection, arrangement and modification of the Markan materials). It is therefore proper it to look for authorial intention in the Gospel of Matthew.

text, or at least a major portion of the Jesus tradition contained in it.

The following are a few examples indicating an authorial intentionality in Matthew's Gospel. The insertion of the Q-saying (cf. Lk 13.28f) in the pericope of the centurion (8.5-13) reaffirms the importance in Matthew's Gospel of the gentile theme in relation to the universal commission by the risen Jesus (28.16-20).[7] The meaning of τοῦ πονηροῦ in Mt 6.13b, which has no Lukan parallel in the Lord's Prayer, may be taken to be intended by Matthew to mean the "evil one,"[8] that is "Satan" (the devil).[9] This reading is supported by the evangelist's substitution of ὁ πονηρός in Mt 13.19 for ὁ σατανᾶς in the parallel text of Mark (4.15), and his further use of the phrase in Mt 13.38 ("the sons of the evil one").

By comparing with Mk 9.41f, the "little ones" (τῶν μικρῶν) in Mt 10.42, and hence also in 18.6, is probably meant by Matthew to refer to Jesus' disciples in general; it is not a designation for some particular group within the body of Jesus' disciples. In this connection, Matthew's reworking of his Markan material reinforces the reading

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[7] Cf. also Mt 2.1-12; 4.14-16; 10.17-18 ; 12.17-21; 15.21-28.

[8] That is, taking τοῦ πονηροῦ to be masculine (cf. Mt 5.39), so NIV, NRSV. The term appears to be a favourite Christian term for the devil in the New Testament (Eph 6.16; Jn 17.15; 1 Jn 2.13f; 3.12; 5.18f; cf. also 2 Thess 3.3) and writings of the Apostolic Fathers (Barnabas 2.10; 21.3; Martyrdom of Polycarp 17.1).

[9] On "Satan" as the appellation of devil (ὁ διάβολος), cf. Mt 4.1-11 and 16.23.

that, apart from anaphoric use,[10] the "disciples" (oi μαθηταί) in his Gospel is intended as a general term for Jesus' followers,[11] of whom the "twelve" only form part of the group.[12] The non-specific references of "little ones" and "disciples" have significant implications for an overall understanding of the community discourse (18.1): Jesus' instructions for communal life are intended for all disciples, not just for "leaders" of the Christian community.

Up to this point we have been commenting on the redaction-critical construal of the authorial meaning of the gospel text. A related question is the understanding by Matthew's first (historical) readers or hearers. Do the two "meanings" coalesce? The understanding of the first historical reader or hearers will be discussed in the

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[10] In Mt 17.6,10,13; 21.6; 26.26,35,36,40,45,56 the "disciples" refer back to individual disciples or "the twelve."

[11] *Contra* E.R. Martinez (1961), oi μαθηταί (αὐτοῦ) denotes the group of Jesus' disciples (including the "twelve"); cf., e.g., Mt 8.21; 14.15,19,22,26; 15.2,12, 23,32,33; 16.5,13,21,24; 17.19; 19.10,13,25. On Matthean redaction: (1) Matthew has reworked his Markan material to let Jesus' disciples speak or act together as a group: see Mt 13.10 cf. Mk 4.10; Mt 24.1 cf. Mk 13.1; Mt 21.20 cf. Mk 11.21; Mt 24.3 cf. Mk 13.3; Mt 26.8 cf. Mk 14.4. (2) Matthew is the only synoptic Gospel which does not report Jesus' appointment of the twelve disciples (cf. Mk 3.13-19; Lk 6.12-16). By omitting this episode the first evangelist appears to relativize the importance of "the twelve." (3) Thus in Mt 13.10, "the disciples" replace "the twelve" in Mk 4.10; and Mt 21.17 has further omitted "the twelve" in Mk 11.11. See also U. Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew" [Etr.] (1983), 99.

[12] The "twelve disciples," "the twelve," "eleven disciples" or "the ten" appear only in Mt 10.1-5a; 11.1; 20.17,24; 26.14,20,47; 28.16.

social-scientific reading in the next chapter. The difference in the reading from the redactional and social-scientific perspectives will be apparent in the interpretation of the community discourse in later chapters. But the very question of possible different readings has pointed to the necessity of clarifying the readership in a redaction-critical reading.

II. Who is the Reader in a Redaction-Critical Reading?

In our understanding of a redaction-critical reading of Matthew's Gospel, the reader is a *modern* reader at the end of the twentieth century, to be differentiated from the *historical*, intended reader. Historically, the intended readers/hearers of the Gospel are members of Matthew's Christian community of late first century. In a redaction-critical reading it is the modern reader who is reading Matthew's Gospel[13] with a "methodology" developed in the 1950's.[14] In other words, a redaction-critical reader does not assume the role of the intended reader. The difference between the two readings may perhaps be compared to George

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[13] Our perception of "reader" in the redaction-critical model of readership is thus different from that of J.D. Kingsbury. In his "Reflections on 'The Reader' of Matthew's Gospel" (1988), Kingsbury considers the intended reader (member of Matthew's community) as the "reader" in a redaction-critical reading. Such identification does not do justice to the diachronic perspective of redaction criticism - a "synoptic" reading of Matthew's Gospel regarding the composition process of Matthew's Gospel based on the two-source hypothesis.

[14] For a succinct summary of the antecedent of redaction-critical method and its development, see Stanton 1992:24-28.

Steiner's (idealistic) distinction of "critic" and "reader."[15] The modern "redaction reader" is essentially a "critic" who is "judge and master of the text," reading Matthew's Gospel "at a distance,"[16] attempting to understand the text from the perspective of the evangelist, and eventually to construct his "theology" and the *Sitz im Leben* of his community through discernment of prominent themes and motifs ("vertical reading") and discovering of his editorial process ("horizontal reading").

On the other hand, Matthew's historical first reader is like Steiner's "reader" who seeks to "enter the text and be entered by the text."[17] And the intended reader, even if he had knowledge of the Gospel of Mark, would not have read the Gospel in a (distancing) "synoptic" way. Members of Matthew's community would most probably read or hear the Gospel from the perspective of their socio-historical circumstance; their reading would be what modern redaction critics call a "transparency" reading, perceiving the story of Jesus - its characters and part of the narrated events - as of immediate relevance of some kind for the community in its life-setting.[18] In the following chapter we shall discuss a historical construction of the understanding of the members of the evangelist's community of the community discourse in a presumed socio-historical context.

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[15] See Steiner, "Critic/Reader" (1979).

[16] Steiner 1979:423-24,449.

[17] Steiner 1979:443.

[18] See Kingsbury 1988:445-48, Luz 1983; 1992.

The redaction-critical reader also differs from the modern reader engaged in a literary reading discussed in chapter 2 above. The difference consists in the literary competence required in their respective way of reading. Whereas the redaction-critical reader reads Matthew's Gospel along with Mark's Gospel, a literary reader is not required to possess knowledge of other synoptic Gospels and any theory of their literary relationships. And even if he/she was conversant with the synoptic problem and the two-source theory, the literary reader is committed to a "close" reading, consciously not letting Mark's Gospel interfere with his/her comprehension of the Gospel of Matthew.

Secondly, the redaction-critical reading is still "historical" in the sense that the reader is seeking the meaning intended by the evangelist. The literary reader is concerned with a textual meaning which is inherent in the internal relationship of the text, and is not interested in the question whether his "close" reading does in fact correspond with the meaning intended by the gospel author.

Thirdly, to the extent that the construction of the socio-historical setting is considered a proper task in redaction-criticism, the gospel text becomes a "window" (if a somewhat foggy one) to the Matthean community from which the Gospel originated. For a literary reader, extra-textual referents are normally not inferred from the gospel narrative. The only explicit exception is the Matthean five discourses with their "dual readership." It is in reading

the discourses that the two readers would appear to "merge" into some common domain. Yet, even here the coalescence is only partial. For whereas the redaction-critical reader has in view the *Sitz im Leben* of the *Matthean community*, the literary reader is concerned with situations pertained to a post-Easter Christian community in general - not the particular socio-historical context of the community in which the Gospel originated.

III. A Proposed Reading Strategy

In our redaction-critical reading of the community discourse, the reader's scope is even more restricted. He/She is concerned neither with the religious outlook (theology) of the evangelist nor with the context of the evangelist and his community. The redaction-critical reading here is focused on the modification of Matthew's source material for the purpose of discovering (1) the flow of thought of the evangelist and hence the delimitation of a "narrative unit" and the transitional verse(s), and (2) the meaning of Jesus' teaching in the discourse as understood by Matthew.

Our redaction-critical reading, then, consists of two steps. First, a synoptic comparison of a narrative unit from the community discourse, as delineated in the earlier literary reading, with the parallel text from Mark. Secondly, the discernment of Matthew's alteration of the Markan text. From the transformation, Matthew's flow of thought or the meaning of Jesus' words is inferred. On the

basis of the modifications, the perceived meaning of a sentence and of the narrative unit is understood to be the "original meaning" of the text, the meaning intended by the evangelist.

IV. Concluding Remarks

As a modern reader of Matthew's Gospel, our redaction-critical reading of the Gospel, based on the priority of Mark, is undoubtedly different from that of Matthew's intended reader/audience of his Christian community. In particular our reading of the community discourse will be focused on discerning the evangelist's rearrangement and alterations of Jesus' sayings (from Mark and Q and sources available to Matthew) to form a discourse on community life. In a sense, the redaction-critical reading undertaken in this thesis is "literary," for it is a comparative study of the synoptic differences: Matthew's redactional changes upon the tradition of Jesus as found in his sources. Yet, the literary method is to serve the *historical* interest and purpose of the modern reader: to seek the evangelist's distinct redactional emphases. And in its concern to elucidate the *author's intention*, redaction-critical reading is historical.

Chapter 4

A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

In this chapter I shall describe the social-scientific approach to Matthew's Gospel in the present study. I shall first review in section I below the two general directions which a social-scientific reading of the Gospels may proceed (referential and non-referential), and indicate that there is a social and referential dimension of Matthew's Gospel and in the major discourses in particular which entails a referential reading of the gospel text. This will be followed by brief remarks concerning some methodological problems inherent in any social-scientific approach to the Gospels.

Section II presents a discussion of the "reader" of a social-scientific reading, an interpretative aspect which is often neglected in present biblical social-scientific reading of the Gospels. In section III, I shall outline the general principle of reading strategy in our referential social-scientific interpretation of Matthew's Gospel: the need for the construction of a reading scenario. Section IV then offers a reconstruction of the Matthean community, which constitutes the reading scenario for our social-scientific interpretation. In section V, I shall outline the social-scientific concepts and theories which form the interpretative framework for our social-scientific reading of Matthew's community discourse.

I. The Gospels and Social-Scientific Interpretation

Since Matthew's Gospel tells a story of Jesus and portrays Jesus' interactions with his contemporaries, the gospel narrative effectively creates an "illustrative" world, describing certain aspects of the evangelist's world, a predominantly Jewish social world in Palestine in the first century.[1] The Gospel's historical and social dimensions are particularly conspicuous in a number of narrative statements that refer to the time of writing or speak to its "reader," and also in those instances of narration which betray the gospel author's sentiment probably reflecting the tense relationship between the author's group and the Jewish community.[2] Thus, if the narrative character of the Gospel entails a literary interpretation, the socio-historical dimension of the narrative invites a social-scientific study of the text.

Social-scientific interpretation of a Gospel may be broadly defined as an understanding of the social dimensions of the gospel text, and its context of genesis, through the utilization of descriptive categories, perspectives, and theories from the social sciences. The

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[1] Here we employ Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg's distinction of "illustrative" and "representational" world created in narrative arts (*The Nature of Narrative* [1966], 83-89). A narrative which seeks to describe only some aspects of reality is "illustrative," its narrative world is mainly symbolical. On the other hand, the kind of narrative that seeks to duplicate reality is "representational," and the narrative world created is mimetic.

[2] Cf. Mt 27.8; 28.15b: "to this day"; 24.15b: "let the reader understand"; 4.23; 9.35; 12.9:"their synagogues(s)."

approach includes studies of the plausible correlation between the literary, theological and social aspects of the text, and the way in which the text is the evangelist's reflection upon and response to his socio-historical context.[3] In my view, a social-scientific interpretation does not in principle deny the possibility that a meaning of the gospel text can be construed from the literary structure of the Gospel, but it does insist that the text conveys a social dimension of meaning which cannot be uncovered by a thorough-going literary reading. A social-scientific approach takes the view that language derives its meaning from the social world,[4] and looks at the Gospel through a "social-scientific lens" furnished by the social sciences.

A social-scientific approach to the Gospels may take the form of a referential or non-referential reading of the text. In a non-referential social-scientific approach, an interpreter draws on theory and insights from social sciences, but the gospel narrative is read without seeking to relate the text to the world of its author. A non-referential social-scientific approach to the Gospel of Mark is provided by David Rhoads's reading of Mark's Gospel, using the theory of purity and pollution developed

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[3] John Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (1993), 7.

[4] See Bruce Malina, *Calling Jesus Names* (1988), xiv-xvi; "Reading Theory Perspective: Reading Luke-Acts" (1991), esp. 6-11, 20-21; John Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (1993), 8.

by the British anthropologist Mary Douglas.[5] In understanding Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders as centring around the issues of Jewish "holiness," the cultural anthropological theory of purity is used as the interpretative framework for understanding the meaning and significance of Jesus' ministry in terms of his conception of holiness. However, Rhoads's social analysis is focused on the narrative world created in the Gospel.[6] In Rhoads's own words:

> ... the analysis will focus on the narrative world of Mark's Gospel. Thus it will not deal with the historical Jesus or with Mark's community, but with the society and the Jesus movement portrayed in Mark's narrative."[7]

Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey's reading of Mt 12 and 26-27 from the labelling perspective of social deviance is also a non-referential interpretation of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders, and his suffering, death and resurrection.[8]

In contrast, in a referential reading of Matthew's

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[5] Rhoads, "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries" (1992).

[6] Malina/Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Name* (1988), chs. 2-4. It is to be noted that in ch. 1, the reading of Mt 12 is referential. There the text is understood as reflecting the situation of the early stage of Matthew's group living in a small Jewish community with characteristics of a "witchcraft society," locked in conflict with the Pharisaic leaders of another reformed group.

[7] Rhodes, 1992:144.

[8] For a non-referential social science approach, see also John Pilch, "Vision in Revelation and Alternate Consciousness" (1993), and "The Transfiguration of Jesus" (1995). See also Wayne Meeks's "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism" (1972).

Gospel, and other canonical Gospels as well, the gospel text is regarded as a "window" (if only a foggy one) to the Christian group(s) behind the text. Underlying this referential reading are two fundamental presuppositions regarding the nature of Gospels. (1) Matthew's Gospel was written within and for a group (or groups) of Christians in a particular social location.[9] (2) The evangelist's work embodies his reflection upon and response to his social environment, shared within his community: the story of Jesus reflects the social experience of the evangelist's Christian community.[10]

In a referential social-scientific interpretation to Matthew's Gospel, the interpreter seeks the meaning of the text as intended by the author in relation to the particular social setting of the evangelist and his Christian groups(s), by viewing the Gospel with the perspective and insights of social sciences.

A referential social-scientific study of a synoptic Gospel is often combined with redaction-critical analysis

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[9] See, e.g., Philip Esler, *The First Christians in their Social World* (1994), 6,11. On social-scientific criticism's goal of seeking the historical meaning of the text (as intended by the author), see Elliott 1993:91.

[10] See Esler 1994:85-86: the story of Jesus in John's Gospel is "transparent" of the circumstances of the Johannine community for which the Gospel was written. For Matthew's Gospel, see, e.g., U. Luz, "Matthew's Anti-Judaism: Its Origin and Contemporary Significance" (1992). This "transparency" is the third basic assumption of redaction-criticism, alongside the two-source hypothesis and Matthean theology; see G.N. Stanton 1992:45. However, with respect to Matthew's Gospel, Stanton also issues warnings against over-confidence and the drawing of too specific inference from indirect evidence in the Gospel regarding the Matthean community (pp. 45-51).

of the gospel text. The combined approach attends to "incidental details" and redactional modifications for clues for reconstructing the social world of the Christian community behind the gospel text.[11] Social-scientific theory or model is used (1) to delineate the nature of the social experience of the evangelist and his community in their particular life-situations, and hence (2) to suggest plausible explanations for certain prominent feature(s) of the gospel text in the light of the group's experience.

For the Gospel of Matthew, this approach is perhaps best exemplified in the work of the Matthean scholar Graham Stanton. Stanton draws on the sociological studies of sectarianism, legitimation, and conflict theory to sensitize one's reading of Matthew's Gospel for perceiving the social experience of the Matthean communities as reflected in the text.[12] From aspects of Matthew's

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[11] In view of its literary form as a story of Jesus, any contextual information is necessarily an inference from the Gospel itself. Thus, in Matthew's Gospel, the evangelist's preference for the word "city" (πόλις) to "village" (κωμή) [cf. esp. 10.23; 23.34] and his use of terms for large sums of money have been seen as indicating his community inhabiting an urban environment; it is a "well-to-do city church" (Kilpatrick 1946:124-26,134); see also Kingsbury 1978:66-67. On the other hand, based on a questionable model of development of community discerned in the strata of traditions in Matthew, Malina and Neyrey (1988: ch. 1, esp. pp. 5-8,10,11,23) have situated the *early stage* of the Matthean group in small Jewish village. On the basis of such texts as 4.15; 19.1, H.D. Slingerland (1979) suggests that the expression πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου reflects Matthew's geographical stance of writing from the east bank of R. Jordan. Cf. also 13.52; 22.7 for possible contextual allusion, respectively, to the evangelist's self-perception and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

[12] Stanton delineates his sociological approach in his *A Gospel for A New People* (1992), ch. 4.

redactional work and the presence of prominent features of anti-Jewish polemics in the Gospel, Stanton adduces that Matthew's community is a beleaguered, predominantly Jewish Christian group, conscious of its recent traumatic parting from local synagogues.[13] A similar methodological approach is adopted by J. Andrew Overman in his reading of Matthew's Gospel.[14]

However, a referential social-scientific approach to Matthew's Gospel *without* consideration of its sources and their modification and transformation by the evangelist can be undertaken. This has the advantage of freeing the study of Matthew's Gospel from any particular hypothesis about the literary relation of the synoptic Gospels. Without recourse to redaction-criticism, this is the approach Anthony Saldarini adopted in his *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (1994), a work devoted to a reconstruction of the Matthean community. Solely from the analysis of the Gospel itself, and employing the labelling theory of social deviance, Saldarini attempts to understand the Matthean community as a (Jewish) deviant group within the Jewish society.[15]

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[13] See esp. chs 5-8 in Stanton's 1992 work.

[14] Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism* (1990). See also Malina 1988, ch. 1. On a social-redaction critical approach to Luke-Acts, see Philip Esler, *The Community and Gospel* (1987).

[15] The deviance approach along the direction developed by Kai Erickson is also utilized by Jack Sanders for explaining the earliest Christianity's cleavage with "Judaism;" see his *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants* (1993).

Stephen Barton's *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (1994) represents a pluralistic reading of the two synoptic Gospels. In explicitly separating sociological reading from form-, redaction-critical and literary reading of the same text, Barton's work also exhibits this mode of referential social-scientific reading: his sociological reading is a "close" reading of the texts, independent of previous readings. But, unlike Saldarini who focus on the contextual reconstruction of the Matthean community, and more akin to Stanton's approach, Barton's referential reading is exegetical, attempting to bring out the meaning of the text from a sociological perspective in the light of the social setting of the Matthean community. The gospel texts are perceived in terms of the legitimation of the Matthean group in forming an alternate community through the authority of Jesus' words: commitment to Jesus' commandment takes priority over obligations of family ties, and Jesus' teachings form the basis of the group identity and its solidarity.

As we have seen in chapter 2, the Matthean discourses, more clearly than the rest of the narrative, present Jesus as speaking past the characters in Matthew's story to the reader on matters relating to the experience of a post-Easter community. In view of this "reader-oriented" nature of the discourses, a social-scientific study of the community discourse would rightly assume a referential reading. Our approach from a social-scientific perspective will be undertaken independent of the other literary and

redaction-critical readings. In the present study, the discourse on community life will be comprehended in the light of a reconstructed social location of the evangelist and his community, which I believe will provide a set of plausible scenarios for the historical understanding of the community discourse. It will be shown later in the chapter that there is indeed textual evidence which indicates a sectarian ethos of a group for which the Gospel was written. The employing of perspectives and ideas from the social sciences will form part of the interpretative framework which provides conceptual medium for expressing the meaning of the gospel text.

Before delineating the particular social-scientific approach in this thesis to the Matthean community discourse, a few words need to be said about the methodological problems that arise from application of social-scientific theory to gospel interpretation. Since objections to and critical assessment of social-scientific approach have been discussed elsewhere,[16] I shall only comment briefly on those aspects of the methodology relevant to our study here.

(1) Social-scientific theory is not for "filling" up "gaps" of historical knowledge.[17] It is, rather, a "heuristic tool" for generating new angles of enquiry to

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[16] See esp. Edwin Judge 1980, C.S. Rodd 1981, B.J. Malina 1982, Philip Esler 1987:12-16, J.H. Elliott 1993: 87-100.

[17] G.N. Stanton 1992:87. J.H. Elliott, 1993:40-47. See also Morgan/Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (1988), 141-42,147-54.

the Gospel and thus to address the Gospel with fresh questions that may enable a better historical understanding of the text.[18]

(2) A major difficulty in a social-scientific approach to the Gospels inheres in the appropriation of social-scientific concepts and theories for interpreting *ancient* texts. In my view, the use of "etic" terms to express the meaning of the gospel text is not objectionable if they enable the interpreter to appreciate more deeply the social dimension of the text and its relation to the special features of the Gospel, provided of course that such description from an "outsider" point of view does not unnecessarily distort the substance of what the author is thought to mean.

In the absence of external evidence for "close comparison,"[19] there is also the hermeneutical danger of imposing an irrelevant scenario upon the gospel text; the interpreter simply envisions the wrong sort of experience of the evangelist's community, and thereby brings to the text inappropriate socio-historical questions. The danger

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[18] See, e.g., J.H. Elliott's (1986) clarification of the sociological models and theoretical perspective, and critique on Gerd Theissen's *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (1978).

[19] But see Stanton's discernment of the Damascus Document as offering a relevant "close comparison" to the Gospel of Matthew as regarding to a similar "parting of the way" from the parent Jewish body (1992, ch. 4). See also Esler's use of the Community Rule as a close comparison for John's Gospel with regard to the perception of both the Qumran community and the Johannine community as introversionist sects in relation to the (parent) Jewish community (1994, ch. 5).

can only be mitigated by a constant methodological self-reflection on the part of the interpreter, and an openness to alternative interpretations from other perspectives.

(3) There is also the hermeneutic circle inherent in a social-scientific reading which attempts contextual construction through inference from internal evidence: a life-setting is derived from a certain interpretation of the text, which is in turn used to elucidate the text itself.[20] In a historical reading of an ancient text when the socio-historical setting of the text is lacking, this circularity cannot be entirely avoided. To minimize the impact of the hermeneutic circle, the interpreter must be perceptive as to what constitutes "incidental details" that are indicative of the social circumstance of Christian community from which the text originated. Thus the exegetes should be conscious of the literary form of the Gospel (though this is often overlooked): it is a narrative, telling the story of Jesus, not that of the Christian community itself.

II. Who is the Reader in a Social-Scientific Reading?

The above discussion of social-scientific approaches to the Gospels brings us to the crucial question of the "reader" in a social-scientific reading of Matthew's Gospel. Before we come to the more specific reading strategy, a clarification of the reader in a social-

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[20] See also G.N. Stanton 1992:89. This hermeneutic circularity is prominent in Donald Hagner's article, "The *Sitz Im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew" (1985).

scientific interpretation is in order.

The reader of our social-scientific reading of Matthew's Gospel is a modern reader. This reader is, however, different from the "literary reader" discussed in chapter 2. First, the "social-scientific" reader takes on himself the "reading perspectives" of the gospel author and his first recipients in their socio-historical circumstances. In contrast, modern literary reader does not put himself/herself in their shoes of the evangelist or his original recipients. The literary reader assumes the role of the "reader" implied by the "textual structure." The social and historical context of the gospel author does not have a role in the *literary* reading adopted in this thesis.

Secondly, in reading with the evangelist and members of his community, the social-scientific reader attempts to understand the discourse as an intra-group communication employing insights from social-psychological studies of speech accommodation. The reader also expresses his reading in terms of concepts and vocabulary from modern studies of community and social deviance, and social-psychological phenomenon on group membership. A social-scientific reading thus requires a *literary competence* - the ability to make sense of the gospel text - which is rather different from that of a "literary reader." The two readers thus differ in their respective interpretative frameworks.

Thirdly, the social-scientific reader also differs from his literary counterpart in their respective reading strategies. In a literary reading, the meaning of the

community discourse emerges from the interaction between the textual structure and the reader in the reading process. For the social-scientific reader, the community discourse is read in relative isolation (from its narrative context). A social-scientific reading seeks the historical meaning of the text, what the author meant, and is bound to the socio-historical context of the evangelist and his original audience.

III. A Proposed Reading Strategy

In the above sections we have delineated the general approach of social-scientific interpretation adopted in this thesis. We shall now elaborate more specifically on the reading process of our referential approach. In the absence of extra-textual data for the Matthean community, the reader must construct a reading scenario to relate the text and its context. Following Bruce Malina, the social-scientific reading is, I believe, best provided by A.J. Sanford and S.C. Garrod's scenario model of reading.[21]

In brief, this scenario reading considers a text as setting forth a series of explicit or implicit scenes, which in turn evoke in the reader a set of scenarios that

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[21] Sanford/Garrod, *Understanding Written Language* (1981). Malina employs the model of scenario reading as the theoretical framework for social-scientific reading of New Testament texts. See his "Reading Theory Perspective: Reading Luke-Acts" (1991), and also Malina/Neyrey 1988, xiii-xiv. This scenario reading, I believe, is what New Testament scholars who employ methods and insights from social science in gospel studies have been doing all along. It is only that the reading process has not been made explicit.

rearrange the scenarios directed from the text. The scenarios from the reader then form the basis for interpreting the text; the reading scenarios form the background of meaning for the "scenes" in the text.

In Matthew, some text-segments evoke (1) an image of the original audience and its experience as a group in its social world, and (2) a sense of intra-group communication. As will be shown in the following paragraphs, these passages in turn evoke in the reader a Matthean group as a deviant group in the Jewish society with a chain of conceptions related to "deviant sect": group boundaries, conduct and beliefs that diverge from the dominant Jewish community, and the social ethos of the group that distinguishes it from the parent body. The scenarios from the text further stimulate the reader in search for some appropriate social-scientific perspective and theory for understanding the text. This is the general approach to our interpretation of the community discourse.

An important part of a referential social-scientific reading is therefore the construction of a set of scenarios appropriate for Matthew's Gospel and in particular for the community discourse. This involves a reconstruction from the internal evidence of the Gospel of the Matthean community and its social experience. These scenarios coupled with a social-scientific framework then constitute an important part of the interpretive framework for our reading of the discourse on community life.

The discourse will first be approached from the point

of view of the evangelist. The reading will be guided primarily by the social ethos of the Matthean community and the related concept of group boundaries involving a "public" and a "private" face. Both Matthew and members of his community shared the conviction that in their own gathering for worship they are separated from unbelieving Jews as the true people of God.[22] For the evangelist, his purpose in the community discourse is to draw out what is entailed in a life living to do God's will (ethos).

The social-scientific reading will also attempt to perceive plausible social-psychological implications of the community ethos for its members, on the supposition that its ethos has been substantialized as a result of Matthew's revitalization of the community spirit.

The community discourse will then be read from the perspective of members of the community. The first readers or listeners supply a set of scenarios in reading the discourse, and understood the discourse in the light of the situations in which they were in. Like the reading from the point of view of the evangelist, this reading represents a construction of the reading/listening experience of the first recipients. It is akin to what Robert Hellenga has called "literary experience."[23] Hellenga's literary experience is adopted here, but is imbued with a social meaning. This reading/listening experience is social in

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[22] See further discussion below.

[23] Robert Hellenga, "What is a Literary Experience Like?" (1982).

character because the experience construed is believed to be shared among, or by most, members of the Matthean community. (1) Some parts of the community discourse articulate the feeling of its members: they express what the community has felt of its perception of "reality;" (2) others lead the first recipients to look at things from a new perspective and thus to see old things in a new light. To these two dimensions of reading/listening experience, we shall add a third dimension: (3) still other words of Jesus in the discourse evoke particular thoughts and feelings in members of the community in their reaction to the common social experience of being looked upon as "deviant" in the (broader) Jewish society.

IV. A Reading Scenario: Construction of the Matthean Community

The following reconstruction of Matthew's community is aimed to provide a portrait of the Matthean community,[24] and thus to provide a set of scenarios for a plausible historical understanding of the community discourse in its socio-historical context.

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[24] Graham Stanton's caution (1992:388) against taking the "Matthean community" as a small *single* group is well taken here. Thus in our conception the Matthean community is a cluster of related, predominantly Jewish groups situated in more or less similar *social location* over a small geographical area and characterized by similar *social ethos*. See discussion below. I differ from Stanton in emphasizing the common character of these related Jewish Christian communities. Because of common group features, Matthew's Gospel, especially the discourses, is relevant to this cluster of communities, although obviously in different ways for different groups.

1. *A Predominantly Jewish Community*

While Matthew provides no unambiguous information in the narrating of the story of Jesus for the geographical setting of his group,[25] there is strong internal evidence which suggests that the author of our Gospel is a Jew from a predominantly Jewish Christian group: linguistic usage and style (Semitism), and the distinctively Jewish tone that characterizes much of the gospel material.[26] And convincing evidence and arguments for the Jewish (as against gentile) authorship have been adduced in the recent scholarly works of W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison,[27] U.

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[25] Davies/Allison 1988:146-47; see also Luz 1989:92. The region of origin favoured by most NT scholars are Palestine and Syria. For survey of recent scholarly opinions, see Stanton 1984:1941-42, Luz 1989:91; 1994:18, and Davies/Allison 1989:138-39. Recently, in connection with his research on the propagation of early Christianity through "social network," American sociologist Rodney Stark (1991) has put forth social and physical conditions in Syrian Antioch as the basis for the city as the provenance of the Matthean community.

[26] (1) On semitic style and language, see, e.g., the Matthean asyndeton (esp. the asyndetic λέγει/ἔφη: 4.7; 17.25; 19.18,20,21; 25.21,23; 26.34,35; 27.65; cf. also 25.22; see also 12.41f; 13.24,31), genitive of quality (5.22; 23.15), the characteristic Matthean expression, the "kingdom of heaven" (4.17; 5.3,10,20; 7.21; 10.7, et al), the rabbinic phrase, ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης (9.22; 15.28; 17.18), the reference and address to God as heavenly Father (e.g., 6.1,4,6,9,18; 10.20,32f), sin as "debt" to God (6.12; cf. Lk 11.4). On Matthew's Semitism, see Davies/Allison 1988:80-85; M. Black 1967:55-61,108-12. (2) On Jewish themes, see the emphasis on Jesus' fulfilling the law and the prophets (5.17), the permanent validity of the law (5.18), Jesus as sent only to Israel (15.14; cf. 10.5f), Jesus as the new Moses and embodiment of Israel (2.1-21; 4.1-11), the redactional addition of σαββάτῳ in 24.20 on fleeing calamity (cf. Mk 13.18).

[27] Davies/Allison 1988:7-58; in addition to internal evidence, Davies and Allison have also provided a discussion of the witness of Papias (H.E. 3.39).

Luz,[28] G.N. Stanton.[29]

Closely related to the Jewish authorship is the identity of Matthew's first recipients. A Jewish author writing a story of Jesus with a Jewish tone would imply a Jewish audience as well.[30] There is, however, textual evidence which points to the community of Matthew being an ethnically mixed group consisting of Christian Jews and a relatively small number of non-Jewish believers. This is suggested by the post-resurrection commission at the end of the Gospel (28.19f), and Jesus' words in 10.17f in the mission discourse. These, in speaking to a post-Easter reader, presuppose a mission to gentiles alongside the Jews. Furthermore, on the plausible presupposition that the kind of tradition incorporated into Matthew's story of Jesus is a function of the ethnic situation of the Matthean community,[31] the subtle emphasis on gentiles in the infancy

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[28] *Matthew 1-7* [Etr.] (1989), 79-82; see also Luz's reiteration of his view in *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (1994), 14.

[29] *A Gospel For A New People* (1992), 131-39. Stanton has given a brief overview of recent NT scholars who advocate gentile authorship, and rightly points out that it is arbitrary to link pre-Matthean tradition with earlier Jewish stage, and Matthean redaction with the later gentile development of Matthew's community.

[30] Davies and Allison (1988:17) have rightly pointed out that, while opinions among New Testament scholars remain divided as to the meaning of Papias' words reported by Eusebius in H.E. 3.39, Papias's testimony at the minimum points to a belief in early Christian tradition that the Gospel of Matthew was written for Jews who believed in Jesus.

[31] On this see further discussion below.

narrative and indeed throughout the gospel narrative[32] also points to the gentile inclusion in the Matthean community.[33] Yet considering the predominantly Jewish materials in the Gospel, the gentile mission was probably a relatively recent development. As we shall see in chapter 8, this ethnic picture of the Matthean community has significant bearing on the interpretation of 18.15-20 from a socio-linguistic perspective.

2. *A Mixed Community of Wheat and Tares*

The parables of the sower and of tares among wheat with their interpretations in the parable discourse, suggest that over time the Matthean community found itself confronted with the problem of false discipleship. There are those who claimed their faith in Jesus and yet displayed no true essence of discipleship; there are "disciples" who are overly concerned with things of this world.[34] This internal situation in fact matches the narrative portrayal of the disciples who falter in discipleship in their preoccupying with status and power.[35] Several passages in the Gospel indeed pronounce judgment on

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[32] Cf. Mt 2.1-12; 4.12-16; 5.13-16; 8.11f; 12.15-21; 15.21-28; 27.15-26; 27.54.

[33] See also A.J. Saldarini, "Boundaries and Polemics in the Gospel of Matthew" (1995), 249-50,252; R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (1989), 108,211, D.J. Harrington, *Matthew* (1991), 9.

[34] See Charles W.F. Smith, "The Mixed State of the Church in Matthew's Gospel" (1963), and esp. Robert McIver, "The Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat (Matt 13.24-30,36-43)" (1995).

[35] Cf. Mt 16.21-26; 17.24-18.1; 19.27; 20.20-28.

the unfaithful members of the community.[36]

3. *The Community as a Deviant Group Within the Jewish Society*

There are a number of narrative statements or scenic-description which, as we shall see later in the present chapter, have a reference to an extra-textual reality or betray the evangelist's (and presumably that of his community he represents) "sectarian" sentiment.[37] Without adopting a "transparency" reading that amounts essentially to a modern form of allegorical exegesis,[38] an investigation into the narrative dimensions of Matthew's Gospel may shed some light on the social reality underlying it.[39]

The works of Laurent Stern (1990) and Hayden White

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[36] Cf. Mt 7.5 ("hypocrites"); 7.23 ("evildoers"); 7.15; 24.11 ("false prophets"); and other judgment scenes in 22.1-14; 24.45-51; 25.1-13,14-30,31-46.

[37] Cf. also the narrative voice which refers to the world of the reader: ἕως/μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ("to this day") at 27.8; 28.15.

[38] The "transparency" reading is a prominent feature in much redaction-critical or/and redaction-sociological studies of the synoptic Gospels. See, e.g., G. Bornkamm (1963), H.J. Held (1963) on Jesus' calming of the storm in Mt 8.23-27; D. Hill (1972:107), U. Luz (1995:18) on Mt 4.24 (Syria as the probable regional provenance of Matthew's Gospel); Hill (1972: 172), Davies/Allison (1991:96) on Mt 9.8 (the authority to forgive sin); J.P. Meier (1979:153), Luz (1992:407), D.A. Hagner (1995:630) on 22.7 (the king's destroying of the city); H.D. Betz (1985:17-22,35), followed by J.T. Sanders (1993:19-27), on the Sermon on the Mount; Luz's study on "disciples" in Matthew (1983), and his overall understanding of Matthew's Gospel as an "inclusive story" (1992); J.A. Overman's referential reading on Matthew's attitude to the outside world and his community's institutional roles (1990:106-33; see also pp. 46-48).

[39] See also J.D. Kingsbury (1988:549) and M.A. Powell (1990:87,97-98).

(1980) form the point of departure of our investigation into the social context of Matthew. In his insistence that historical narrative forms an indispensable part of historiography, Laurent Stern maintains that the author's beliefs and values constitute a decisive factor in the narrative presentation of historical events. In modern historical narrative, to narrate an historical event is not merely to describe what happened but also involves the historian's interpretation of the event. For to narrate events in the form of a story is to present an understanding of their interrelation. In particular, the narrative must give an account of what an historical personage was trying to achieve because of his/her beliefs and desires. These beliefs and desires are ascribed to the historical agent by the author based on his/her construction from the available data. It is this construction of beliefs and desires which makes sense of the events, and together with the narration of their actions they constitute the essence of historical narrative. The interpretation which consists in the ascription of beliefs and desires to the human agents who did or brought about certain things, is largely dependent upon the historian's own basic idea and attitude toward the "world" around him/her. No historical account is independent of a given viewpoint.[40]

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[40] Laurent Stern, "Narrative versus Description in Historiography" (1990). On the role of narrative in historical writing, see also Arthur Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of History* (1968), 255; Hayden White, *The Writing of History* (1978), 49. On the influence of the

Although the Gospel of Matthew, like other biblical narratives, is not a historical narrative in the modern sense of the term,[41] Matthew's story of Jesus does appear "realistic," or "history-like." The evangelist apparently regarded the traditions of Jesus, at least those he incorporated into his story of Jesus, as historical, and he organized them into a narrative form and offered an *interpretation* of Jesus' birth and public actions as the fulfilment of the divine purpose.[42] The thoroughly negative representation of the *Jewish leaders* most probably reflects Matthew's view of the leaders of the Jewish community in his day.[43] Similarly, the evangelist's stance

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historical and social environment of the historians on their selection and interpretation of "facts" in the past, see E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (1961), 35-44.

[41] Modern historiography requires that any historical writing reports (in describing and interpreting) events in the original order of their occurrences, and that their cause and effect be "explained" without recourse to supernatural agent. See E.H. Carr 1961:49,74-75,87-108; Arthur Danto 1969:117.

[42] Thus, (1) the birth of Jesus is a supranatural event, but understood as the culmination of the history of Israel under divine providence (1.1-25); (2) the events surrounding Jesus' birth are seen as under divine guidance (1.18-25; 2.1-23); (3) Jesus' baptism is depicted as his submission to God's will (3.13-17); (4) Jesus' preaching is summarized in the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4.17); (5) his healing and other activities are interpreted as the fulfilment of prophecies: the formula citations in 4.14-16; 8.16f; 12.15-21; 13.34f; 21.1-5; cf. also 27.3-10.

Roland Frye (1971, 1979) proposes the view of the canonical gospels as "dramatic history," a selective "historical" account of Jesus not arranged in strictly chronological order and interpreted to convey a message to its audience.

[43] From the context in which Mt 6.10-18 is set, it is clear that the "hypocrites" in 6.2,5,16 are meant to be the "scribes and Pharisees" of 5.20. Compared with his Markan

towards true discipleship (an inner reality of humility and thinking with God) *and* the mixed state of affairs in his Christian group - false disciples present alongside with true disciples[44] - are the *source* of motivation for the portrayal of the *disciples* faltering in their discipleship (their concerns for status and power).[45] Thus, while resisting the zeal of the constant purging of the community from some quarter within it, the evangelist was nevertheless concerned with the state of affairs within his community regarding the essence of discipleship.[46]

The relationship between historical narrative and its context, especially the impact of the author's social world on his work, has been investigated by Hayden White. In an article entitled "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (1980), White has drawn attention to the relation between the writing of historical

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source, Matthew has enhanced the negative representation of the Jewish leaders: 9.18 cf. Mk 7.22; 22.35 cf. Mk 12.28,32-34; 23.13-34 cf. Mk 12.38-40; 12.43-45 portraying the leaders as demon-possessed (cf. Lk 11.24-26 set in a different context); 21.43 (only in Matthew).

[44] The Christian community as a corpus mixtum is addressed in the parable discourse via the parables of the sower, the tares among the wheat, and the fishnet (13.3-8,18-23,24-30,36-43,47-50), and also in the community discourse (18.10-20). In our view, the mixed state of the Christian community and its final separation is dramatically depicted in the eschatological judgment in 25.31-46. The warning in the subparable of the wedding garment (22.11-14), and in the parable of the bridesmaids may also provide a glimpse into the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community.

[45] Cf. Mt 16.23; 18.1; 19.13-15; 19.28; 20.20-28.

[46] See the "mixed state" of the Matthean community in section IV (2) above.

narrative and the consciousness of a "social centre." White suggests that the impulse to narrate, that is, to report historical events in the form of a story having a beginning, middle and end (historical narrative) - in contrast to other forms of historical writings (annals and chronicles) - generally occurs when there is presence of a communal consciousness, especially when there is some form of conflict between the community and the "world" outside. A social centre is needed to locate relevant events "with respect to one another and to charge them with ethical or moral significance" (15). Furthermore, "the reality which lends itself to narrative representation is the *conflict* between desire, on the one side, and the Law, on the other. Where there is no rule or law there can be neither a subject nor the kind of events which lends itself to narrative representation" (16, White's italics). White's "social centre" is a society (community) which is conscious of its own particular existence in that it has developed some sense of authority and a system of law/relations to sustain the existence of the community. Finally, White suggests that narrativity is derived from a "moralizing" impulse. Events are revealed or bestowed their meaning and significance from the perspective of the writer within the community (23-24).

White's insight that the presence of narrativity is associated with communal consciousness is important for a social-scientific study of Matthew's Gospel. Above all, his study suggests that Matthew's writing of the story of Jesus

points to a community of believers in Jesus, conscious of its existence as a distinct group within the broader Jewish community, and which was encountering some form of conflict with its parent community. It also reinforces the contextual character of the Gospel. The internal and external conditions of Matthew's group provide the evangelist with the primary motivation to the writing of an account of Jesus in narrative form.[47]

In fact, in the discourses, in having Jesus lift his eyes beyond the characters in the narrative to the reader clearly shows that Matthew was writing with the consciousness of a "social centre" (a community). This consciousness is especially evident in the community discourse and the parable of the tares among the wheat, with its interpretation, in the parable discourse; both narrative segments show that the Matthean community has developed a sense of communal authority and some norm of moral order.

There are also "incidental details" in the Gospel which betray that the evangelist wrote with a social identity, conscious of its difference and distance from the unbelieving Jewish community. (1) In the narrative

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[47] From a literary perspective, Paul Hernadi (1976) has pointed out the complementary dimensions of communication and representation in a literary work: that an author necessarily communicates through the representation of the narrative world, and that the world of the author is the primary source of motivation for the literary work. Similarly, Robert Weiman (1984, ch. 6) maintains that both the method of narration (literary "point of view") and the author's socio-historical context form the framework in which the literary work acquires its content and shape.

summaries in 4.23-25 and 9.35 which provide an overview of Jesus' ministry, the synagogue is described as "their synagogues." And in 12.9 Jesus is said to enter "their synagogue" (12.9). The qualifying of συναγωγή with the pronoun αὐτῶν where there is no antecedent subject apparently speaks for an "us-them" group differentiation, a distancing sentiment of a dissident minority group within the broader Jewish community. There are other passages in which the synagogue(s) is/are called "their synagogue(s)" (10.17; 13.54; cf. 23.34 "your synagogues"), but in each of these passages there is grammatical antecedent so that "their synagogue" does not necessarily imply an "us-them" antithesis. But when we compare these passages with other synagogue-passages in Matthew (6.2,5; 23.6) in which the word stands alone, a narrative pattern begins to emerge. In 6.2,5; 23.6 the only persons associated with the synagogues are the "hypocrites" and the scribes and Pharisees, and there is no qualifying pronoun. In contrast, in all those passages in which Jesus or his disciples are said to be in the synagogue(s), the synagogue is always "their synagogue," and apart from the narrative summaries (4.23; 9.35) these passages depict an unfriendly or confrontational situation. The narrative perspective thus presents synagogues as a gathering place different from that of the Christian assembly (ἐκκλησία, 16.18; 18.17).

(2) The narrative comment (28.15b) on the bribery of the chief priests and the elders that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body ("this story has been spread among [the]

Jews to this day") also betrays a group sentiment that looks at Jews who reject Jesus and the message of his messenger as the "other."[48]

As to the nature of Matthew's group, the Gospel as the story of Jesus provides only indirect information. Since from 10.6 onwards the mission discourse has in view the post-Easter Christian community, 10.17 envisages a scenario in which members of Matthew's group were flogged by the synagogue authority because of their preaching of Jesus. This verse therefore provides a relatively strong piece of evidence for construing the Matthean group's relationship with the broader Jewish community.[49] From this verse it is clear that Matthew's predominantly Jewish group submitted itself to the synagogue jurisdiction, considering itself part of the Jewish community and willingly intended to stay within it.

However, the community discourse suggests that Matthew's group has its own assembly, gathering in the name of Jesus (18.15-20). Thus, while being in everyday social contact with non-Christian Jews, the Matthean group formed a separate body within the (Jewish) community because of its belief in Jesus. As can be inferred from the Gospel, the story of Jesus suggests the following core beliefs of

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[48] See Stanton, "The Communities of Matthew" (1992), 385. See also Robert Smith, "Matthew's Message for Insiders" (1992), 236-37.

[49] Mt 10.18 should be read in connection with v 17: the disciples brought to the synagogue and the gentile court testifying to both the Jews (αὐτοῖς, referring to the Jews in v 17) and the gentiles for the truth of the gospel.

Matthew's group(s): (1) Jesus is the Davidic messiah whose mission it is to save his people from their sins (1.21) - through his sacrificial death divine forgiveness of sins is obtained (20.28; 26.27f). (2) With the covenant effected through the blood of Jesus, the keeping of the law of Moses (as interpreted in the light of Jesus' teaching and his death) is not so much fulfilling the *obligation* of the (old) covenant mediated through Moses (26.26-28) as doing the will of God.[50] (3) Jesus is the authoritative interpreter of the scripture.[51] (4) The group now constitutes the true people of God, with its leaders being the true "shepherds" of God (21.43; cf. 28.20a). Their status as the true people of God is marked and attested by the divine presence in their gathering mediated through the experience of the risen Jesus in the reading and meditation of what he has taught (18.18-20). This communal self-perception finds concrete expression in the Matthean group's mission to the Jewish people; the unbelieving Jews

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[50] See Mt 7.21,24 on the commandments of Moses (5.21-48) expounded in the Sermon on the Mount as the expression of divine will. Cf. also 12.50. On the law of Moses as the word of God, see 15.4 (ὁ θεὸς γὰρ εἶπεν); cf. Mk 7.10 (Μωϋσῆς γὰρ εἶπεν).

[51] Cf. Mt 5.21-48; 12.1-14; 15.1-20; 19.3-9; 22.23-33,34-40. Jesus' words in 23.2-3 (1) do not so much endorse the authority of the scribes and the Pharisees in interpreting and teaching the scripture as acknowledging the social reality of their control of accessibility to scripture (at least for the Jewish people in general); (2) in fact they know and cite the scripture but do not understand what they speak, as demonstrated in their deeds. (3) Jesus' disciples are to hear from them what the scripture says but not what they teach about the scripture. See M.A. Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Say (Matthew 23.2-7)" (1995), idem., *God With Us* (1995), 75-81.

are outside the fold and need to be brought into faith in Jesus for their salvation.

Adherence to this "ideology" or perception of reality would have significant consequences for the outward conduct of the Matthean Christians. As a result of their interpretation of the Mosaic law in the light of Jesus' teaching, Matthew's group would probably have deviated from some of the accustomed Jewish ways of life. Thus, outwardly the Matthean group might notably be marked by its comparatively loose way of keeping Sabbath (cf. 12.1-13)[52] and even by the non-observance of some of the purity codes (cf. 15.1-20), thereby entailing accusation and judicial penalties from the synagogue authority. Consequently they were likely to be labelled as "deviant" by the leaders of the broader Jewish community and by unbelieving Jews in general. But their "deviant" character is also seen, and perhaps primarily seen in the group's outlook which threatens the core belief and corporate identity of the Jewish community: its perception of divine forgiveness through Jesus atoning death, its "redefinition" of covenant and the group's claim to be the true people of God.[53] Such

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[52] See also Stanton 1992, ch. 8.

[53] On social deviance as transgressing the boundaries of the "symbolic universe" of a society, see Robert Scott, "A proposed Framework For Analyzing Deviance as A Property of Social Order" (1972). In his Deviants (1969), 92-100, J.L. Simmons has studied a semi-isolated "mystic" group whose "deviance" is primarily related to its belief system which deviated from that of conventional society in North America and western Europe. It has increasingly been recognized that apart from behaviour and attributes of a person, thinking and beliefs that depart radically from conventional norms also evoke deviance labelling. On the

views held by the Matthean group are seen to usurp the very (covenant) identity of the people of God from the Jewish people. The harsh language in Matthew against the Jewish leaders and the people as a whole[54] reflects the strained relationship between Matthew's group and the broader Jewish community.[55] Within a Jewish community generally opposed to the message preached by Jesus' messenger, the Matthean group(s) is/are perhaps best regarded as a "deviant sect."[56] The sense of difference and alienation would probably be embodied in the social ethos of the group(s).

4. *The Ethos of the Community*

In comparing society with individuals, Lewis Wirth rightly points to the essence of a group ethos: "The most important thing that we can know about a person is what he takes for granted, and the most elementary and important facts about society are those that are seldom debated and

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more comprehensive definition of social deviance, see Higgins/Butler, *Understanding Deviance* (1982), 2,5.

[54] Cf. esp. the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23.13-36), cf. also 6.2-6,16-18, and the cry of the people before Pilate, "let the blood be upon us and our children" (27.56).

[55] On Matthew's anti-Jewish polemics, see Stanton, 1992, chs. 5,6; Luz 1992. See also Scot McKnight, "A Loyal Critic: Matthew's Polemic with Judaism in Theological Perspective" (1993).

[56] With A.J. Saldarini (1995:252-54), a sect is understood here as a deviant group which is alienated from its parent community but is nevertheless still part of it. The sect claims for itself the correct understanding of the tradition and the group's way of life its true expression. On the meaning of sect, see also L.M. White, "Shifting Sectarian Boundaries in Early Christianity" (1988), 14. On the use of "sect" category and sectarianism in New Testament studies, see Stephen Barton, "Early Christianity and the Sociology of the Sect" (1992).

generally regarded as settled."[57] Ethos can thus be likened to the "character trait" of the social group. As the American cultural anthropologist expresses it, "A people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude towards themselves and their world that life reflects."[58] Ethos thus sums up the moral and evaluative aspects of a social group; it is the group's shared values, its self-perception, and the assumed and generally unarticulated way of perceiving how life is to be lived.[59]

We believe that the underlying ethos of the Matthean community may be discerned from the evangelist's story of Jesus, using insights from socio-psychological studies of language. The social ethos of the Matthean community will be shown in the following section to be an unquestioned way of life which is that of living a life of doing God's will as the true people of God.

In the social-scientific reading of the community discourse in the following chapters we shall show that the evangelist endeavours to delineate the different aspects of the group ethos - what a life living in accordance with

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[57] Lewis Wirth in his preface to Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), xxiii.

[58] Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols" (1957), 421; see also p. 422.

[59] See also A.L. Ipstein, Ethos and Identity (1978), 122; L.E. Keck, "On Ethos of Early Christianity" (1974), 440-41; John Stanley, "The Sociology of Knowledge and New Testament Interpretation" (1984), 134; Stephen Barton, "ethos" (1990).

God's will would entail in community life. This represents the evangelist's effort to counteract an emerging worldly thinking within the community that is undermining the distinctiveness of the community as the true people of God. The community ethos forms an important aspect of the social context for the historical understanding of the community discourse.

V. A Social-Scientific Interpretative Framework

The above reconstruction of the life setting of Matthew's community will facilitate an historical interpretation of the community discourse: the meaning as intended by the evangelist in his social location, and an understanding of the way the discourse would be appropriated by the original audience of the Gospel. To help integrate the textual elements into the socio-historical setting, we need a theoretical social-scientific perspective to organize and interpret the gospel text. The following is a sketch of this interpretive framework within which the community discourse may be understood.

1. *Community and Boundaries*

According to the British anthropologist Anthony Cohen, the notion of "community" suggests a group of people (a) having something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from members of other putative groups. A community thus constitutes a system of values, norms and moral codes which provides meaning and a sense of identity for its members. The

belief, values and perception of reality are usually embodied in the community's traditions and symbolism. The consciousness of "community" is encapsulated in the community "boundaries" symbolically defined.[60] In Cohen's words:

> The reality of community in people's experience thus inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols. Much of the boundary-maintaining process ... is concerned with maintaining and further developing this commonality of symbols."[61]

There is thus in a community a shared repository of symbols, providing a "common language" for its members. Furthermore, the boundaries of a community are constituted by the external "public face," how it is perceived by outsiders, and by its internal "private face" which is experienced only from within by members of the community.[62] As we shall show in the social-scientific interpretation of the community discourse in later chapters, much material in the discourse can be understood as Matthew's clarification or strengthening of the "symbolic boundaries" of the community using Jesus' teaching. The community's internal boundaries (its private face) are drawn using the various symbolic figures of "children," "little ones," "toll-collector and gentile," and "debtor."

Intimately related to group boundaries is the perception of membership. With insights from socio-

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[60] Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), esp. chs. 1,2.

[61] Cohen 1985:16.

[62] Cohen 1985:71-75.

psychological study of group membership, we shall show that in intending to strengthen the boundaries of the community, the discourse may, paradoxically, bring about a negative effect of creating a "threat" to membership and hence a sense of identity crisis. In our social-scientific reading of 18.10-20 and 21-35 in chapters 8 and 9 respectively, it will be shown that this group identity is weakened and even dissolved whenever there is an incongruence between a person's perception of membership criteria and that of the "acknowledged" criteria of the group.

2. *The Matthean Community and Social Deviance*

Another important element forming our social-scientific interpretative framework for reading the community discourse is the concept of social deviance. As a predominantly Jewish group, the Matthean community was understood to be looked upon as "deviant" by unbelieving Jews in the broader Jewish community. From the labelling perspective of social deviance, deviance labelling is essentially a power game. In the words of Stephen Pfohl, "Differences in power translate into differences in the ability to label."[63] A "nonconformist" group labelled deviant is often a minority which attracts condemnation by those influential in the society having the power to set the norm and call forth sanctions.[64] The deviant label sticks when the labellers are powerful enough to elicit a

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[63] Pfohl, *Images of Deviance* (1994), 360. See also Howard Becker, *Outsiders* (1963), 18.

[64] See also Robert Bell, *Social Deviance* (1972), 29.

"consensus" from the majority of the community.[65] Furthermore, deviance-labelling often carries moral implications and has an essentializing effect on persons labelled as deviants. An identified deviant is imputed with some sort of moral inferiority; it is as if the whole personality of a deviant has been "spoiled" by the particular attribute(s), behaviour or life style, belief and values that transgress the norm of a society.[66] We shall see in our social-scientific interpretation of 18.5-9 the kind of emotive reading that would be produced by the members of the Matthean group which has been labelled deviant.

3. *Speech Accommodation Theory and the Ethos of the Matthean Community*

If casual everyday life conversations indicate a social reality tacitly or unconsciously assumed by the dialogue participants[67], then the characteristic expressions the evangelist uses in reference to God and discipleship in his story of Jesus reflect his unquestioned perception of reality and the normative way of life (ethos). Moreover, in showing preference for some particular expressions, the evangelist, as we shall show

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[65] See also Malina/Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names* (1988), 38-39.

[66] On deviance as a master status marker, see Stephen Pfohl's summary of this viewpoint in his *Images of Deviance and Social Control* (1994), 353-55. On the pioneering work in the generalized symbolic value of deviance, see Howard Becker, *Outsiders* (1963): 33; Ervin Goffman, *Stigma* (1963), esp. 4-19. See also Malina/Neyrey 1988:39-40.

[67] See Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), 172-73.

presently, is in fact using the "common language" of his community, expressions which underline the ethos of the community.

The framework of our discussion is based on insights from the Speech Accommodation Theory developed by Howard Giles and his associates,[68] together with other related developments in the "language reflects context" approach in socio-linguistics. Giles's communication accommodation insights have been applied by Bruce Malina to his interpretation of John's Gospel;[69] we believe this socio-linguistic perspective will also contribute to an historical understanding of Matthew's community discourse.[70]

Speech Accommodation Theory is developed for the study of human communicative behaviour and speech diversity in various social settings. In its simplest term, the theory suggests that people tend to maintain or adjust their speech styles depending on their disposition toward their

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[68] Howard Giles, "Linguistic Differentiation in Ethnic Groups" (1978), esp. 380-93; Howard Giles and Philip Smith, "Accommodation Theory: Optimal Level of Convergence" (1979); Jitendran N. Thakerar, Howard Giles and Jenny Cheshire, "Psychological and Linguistic Parameters of Speech Accommodation Theory" (1982); Howard Giles et al, "Speech Accommodation Theory: The First Decade and Beyond" (1987).

[69] See Malina, The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective (1985); "John's: The Maverick Christian Group - the Evidence of Sociolinguistics" (1994).

[70] In their 1987 overview article, Howard Giles and his collaborators have actually relabelled speech accommodation theory as "communication accommodation theory," thus indicating that their theory actually encompasses the wider context of communication beyond speech (41).

communication partners and their perceptions of the interactive situations. Thus the speakers often adapt or accommodate their language styles to that of their interlocutors (linguistic convergence) when they seek communication efficiency, approval, or in order to express social identification or solidarity.[71] Conversely, speech divergence refers to accentuation of speech differences from communicative partners during social interaction in which the speakers intend to distance themselves from their interactants either because of the desire for personal dissociation or for emphasis of group membership.[72] In general, the direction of language shift (convergence/ divergence) is a function of the speaker's friendly or unfavourable disposition toward his or her communication partner(s), and the *magnitude* of the shift (taking into account the speaker's speech repertoire) determined by the perceived social location in the person-salient/group-salient dimension.[73] Furthermore, group-salient encounter is distinguishable into two types, ingroup-outgroup and ingroup-ingroup.[74]In the case of intra-group communication in which group membership is salient, people are conscious that "they share a certain knowledge, attitudes, skills,.

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[71] Giles and Smith 1979:53-65; Thakerar, Giles and Cheshire 1982:207-13.

[72] Thakerar, Giles and Cheshire 1982:213-19.

[73] See Peter Ball, Howard Giles and Miles Hewsstone, "Interpersonal Accommodation and Situational Construals: An Integrative Formalisation" (1985).

[74] Peter Ball *et al*. 1985:278.

and values, certain class, ethnic, physical, religious, or other characteristics which are not shared by others."[75] And in *this* ingroup-ingroup encounter, the communicative speech is characterized by Basil Bernstein's "restricted-code" speech pattern which is context-dependent, as opposed to the "elaborated-code" which is less context-bounded.[76] The speaker-hearer relation as members of the same social group brings about a realization of meaning confined in the group context, meanings that are tied to the unexpressed assumptions and values shared by the members of the ingroup.[77]

On taking the Gospel of Matthew as an instance of communication, the communication is therefore of an intra-group nature. In particular, the major discourses are group-salient as they are addressed to a Christian community conscious of its being a minority (largely Jewish) group within the broader Jewish community. In sharing similar modes of perception, evaluation and articulation of the members of his community, the evangelist naturally converges to the "language" of the community in narrating his story of Jesus in order to facilitate effective communication of the intended message. In accommodating his language, Matthew also shows his identification and solidarity with his ingroup members. As

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[75] Peter Ball *et al*. 1985:278.

[76] See B. Bernstein, "Social Class, Language and Socialization" (1972).

[77] Peter Ball *et al*. 1985:278-81.

the author of the Gospel, the evangelist naturally exhibits his own writing style. The linguistic convergence therefore consists primarily in the accommodation to the group's habitual mode of expressions. From the speech accommodation perspective, certain vocabulary peculiar to Matthew's Gospel is, then, not so much his own favourite vocabulary as his accommodation to the community's habitual linguistic expressions.

Thus from the vantage point of speech accommodation, the Gospel's characteristic expression, "the kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's linguistic convergence to the favourite locution of his community. The term is probably not the community's own creation, but an appropriation from the kingdom language of the Jesus tradition.[78] In the modification of his source material and in narrative summaries, Matthew commits himself to the community's favourite expression.[79]

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[78] Cf. e.g., Mt 5.3 = Lk 6.20b; Mt 11.12 = Lk 16.16; Mt 12.28 = Lk 11.20; Mt 13.11-13 = Mk 4.11f = Lk 8.10; Mt 13.33 = Lk 13.20f.

[79] (1) On Matthew's redactional modification of "kingdom of heaven/God" sayings: Mt 7.21 cf. Lk 6.46; 23.13 cf. Lk 11.52; and 21.43 (no synoptic parallel). In Mt 16.28, in understanding the coming of the kingdom of God in *power* (Mk 9.1) to be the coming of the Son of Man, Matthew nevertheless maintains the "kingdom" language and writes: "... they see the Son of Man coming in his *kingdom*." In Mt 20.21, "in your [Jesus'] kingdom" replaces "in your glory" in Mk 10.3. (2) The convergence to the community's "kingdom" language is also seen in Matthew's other redactional compositions: [i] "word of the kingdom" (13.19; cf. Mk 4.14: "The sower sows the word); [ii] "sons of the kingdom" (8.12 [cf.Lk 13.28c]; 13.38, no synoptic parallel); [iii] "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (16.19, no parallel); [iv] "preaching the gospel of the kingdom" in the narrative summaries (4.23; 9.35; cf. Mk 1.39, which simply refers to Jesus' "preaching"); [v] "this gospel of

The designation of God as the heavenly Father in indirect discourse is another major instance of the evangelist's language accommodation.[80] A third adoption of the particular community locution is the address to Jesus as "Lord" (κύριε). A fourth adoption is the word "righteousness" for designating the conduct of life required of Jesus' disciples.[81] And, the term "little ones" is probably the community's favourite self-reference.[82]

As said previously, the common language of a closely-knit community reflects and expresses the ethos of the community. We shall argue below that the above diction in Matthew's Gospel throws some light on the community ethos. In intra-group communication, as represented by the community discourse, the evangelist naturally employed words and expressions which were shared for expressing cherished religious ideas and an unquestioned way of life, to express solidarity, and to facilitate communication of the message in a more congenial communicative context.

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the kingdom" 24.14; cf. Mk 13.10, "the gospel"). On the redactional origin of "sons of the kingdom," see Bruce Chilton, God in Strength (1977), 191-92.

[80] (1) Matthew's substituting "God," "the Most High," "angels of God," "Holy Spirit" with ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν/σου/ μου qualified either by ὁ ἐν (τοῖς) οὐρανοῖς or ὁ οὐράνιος: 5.45 cf. Lk 6.35; 6.26 cf. Lk 12.24; 10.20 cf. Lk 12.12; 10.29 cf. Lk 12.6; 10.32f cf. Lk 12.8f; 12.50 cf. Mk 3.35. (2) Matthew's qualifying "your/our Father" with the same above expressions: 5.48 cf. Lk 6.36; 6.9 cf. Lk 11.2; 6.32 cf. Lk 12.32. (3) Matthean heavy redaction: 7.21 cf. Lk 6.46. (4) sayings proper to Matthew: 15.13; 16.17; 18.19; 23.9. (5) Matthew's own composition: 18.10, 14,35.

[81] Mt 3.15; 5.6,10,20; 6.1; 6.33 (= Lk 12.31, without "his righteousness"); 21.32.

[82] Cf. Mt 10.42; 18.6,10,14.

In Matthew's Gospel, the "kingdom of heaven (God)" conveys various meanings in different contexts.[83] For the community, the phrase is a customary umbrella term for the manifold divine reality experienced in mundane life or revealed in its glory in the end of time. The term expresses the group's self-perception in consequence of the general failure of its mission among the Jews. Denying the divine presence among the unbelieving Jews in their synagogue assemblies, the Matthean group considered itself the locus where God's rule is manifested and experienced here and now, if only partially, on earth.[84] Hence the

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[83] The multiple senses attributed to "kingdom of heaven/God" is obvious in the various verbs or adverb used in connection with the phrase: (1) as *object* -"to enter," εἰσελθεῖν (future sense) in 5.20; 7.21; 18.4; 19.23,24; πρόαγειν (present sense) in 21.31; εἰσεχεσθαι (present sense) in 23.13; "to shut," 23.13; "to seek," 6.33; "being forcibly attacked and seized" (βιάζεται, ἁρπάζουσιν), 11.12; "to be taken away from and given to," 21.43 ("Therefore the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a group of people who produce the fruit of it."); "to inherit," 25.34; (2) as *subject* - "to be near" (ἤγγικεν), 3.2; 4.17; 10.7; "to come" (ἐλθέτω) [in the future], 6.10; "to have come" ἔφθασεν), 12.28; (3) *as a possession* - 5.3,10; 19.14; (4) *of local sense* (to be "in," or "out of") - 5.19; 8.12; 13.41,43; 18.1,4; 20.21; 26.29; (5) *"for the sake of"* (διά) - 19.12. (6) "kingdom" as a qualifier, 4.23; 9.35; 8.12; 13.19; 13.38; 16.19; 24.14. In the "kingdom" parables, the "kingdom of heaven" is depicted as a divine reality: (1) having a dynamic sense (activity of God), 13.24-30,36-43; 13.31-33; 13.47-50; 18.23-34; 20.1-15; 22.1-13; 25.1-13,14-30; and (2) as a possession, 13.44-46.

[84] A number of "kingdom" parables depict the divine reality being experienced in the community. In Mt 13.24-30,36-43, the parable of the weeds shows that God is active in bring about "sons of the kingdom" into the community (13.24-30,36-43). The twin parables of mustard seed and leaven bespeak a continuity between the present inconspicuous rule of God in the community of Jesus and the future manifestation in glory and power. The clearer statement is perhaps found at 21.43: God will rule over his people through a new leadership.

phrase "kingdom of heaven" reflects the ethos of the community: life on earth is a life obedient to the will of God so that the community as a whole embodies the rule of God over his people.

This community ethos is also echoed in the designation of God as the heavenly Father. The reference to God as the (heavenly) Father is characteristic of the Gospel, although it is not uncommon in contemporary Judaism.[85] Such reference highlights the familial father-son relationship with God, and underlines the ethos of the community that the present life is to be lived by trusting in God as the heavenly Father and doing his will as obedient sons should. The ethos is again revealed in the community's favourite term "righteousness," the expression for proper conduct of life which conforms to the will of God.[86]

The phrase "sons of the kingdom" (8.12; 13.38) also expresses the ethos of a way of life. The common exegetical view is that the Semitic expression conveys a sense of being or destined to be "natural or rightful heirs of

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[85] (1) In direct address: Sir 23.1: κύριε πάτερ καὶ δέσποτα ζωῆς μου; 23.4: "πάτερ and God of my life;" Wisd 14.3: "but it is your providence, O Father (πάτερ), that steers its course;" the 5th and 6th petition of *Shemoneh Esreh*: "bring us back, Our Father, to thy Law," "forgive us, Our Father, for we have sinned." Cf. Jer 3.4: "Have you not just now called to me, My Father, you are the friend of my youth ..."; Jer 3.19: "... And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me." (2) In indirect reference: Isa 63.16 "For you are our Father;" 64.8: "O Lord, you are our Father." Tob 13.4: "... he is our Father for ever." 3 Macc 5.7: "their merciful God and Father." See also Wisd 2.16; Sir 51.10 (?). See G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus* [Etr.] (1902), 184-94.

[86] Mt 3.15; 5.6,10,20; 6.1; 6.33 (= Lk 12.31, without "his righteousness"); 21.32.

the kingdom."[87] The phrase in Matthew is, however, more appropriately understood as emphasizing *submission*: "sons of the kingdom" are those who submit themselves to the rule of God. Thus, the phrase is appropriate for Jews (8.12) as they consider themselves living a life submitting to the rule of God. However, because of the rejection of Jesus by the unbelieving Jewish community, Matthew thinks the phrase now applies more appropriately to his own community (13.38). As the Matthean community's favourite self-designation, the phrase connotes the community as consisting of those who submit to God's rule.

Since, for the Matthean community, Jesus' teachings embody the will of God (7.21,24; cf. 5.17), the community's practice of addressing the (risen) Jesus as "Lord" suggests another instance of the language reflecting the ethos of the community as a community which lives by the will of God. The assumed way of life is summarized in Jesus' reprimand of Peter: to think the things of God as against thinking the things of the world (16.23).[88]

The ethos of the Matthean community will form an important aspect of context of reference in which the community discourse is understood: it is the shared

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[87] Davies/Allison 1991:30. See also A.H. McNeile 1915:105; Thompson 1970:92; R. Gundry 1982:145; D.A. Carson 1984:202; D.E. Garland 1993:96. Ned Stonehouse (1944:229-32), however, takes the phrase "sons of the kingdom" to refer to Jews as members of the theocratic kingdom on earth (Israel).

[88] The disciples are portrayed as falling victim to this worldly thinking: 16.21-28; 18.1; 19.13-15; 19.27; 20.20-24; cf. 23.8-12.

understanding of both the evangelist and the members of his community. Thus "humility" (18.1-4) will be understood as the right inner state of a disciple who thinks his/her life is a doing of God's will. The phrase "little one" as the group members' self-reference then expresses verbally the ethos of the community. As we shall see in our interpretation of the community discourse, the evangelist is seen as spelling out what a life of the doing the will of God implies in the community life of Jesus' disciples.

VI. Concluding Remarks

As an historical approach, our social-scientific interpretation relates Matthew's Gospel to the social-historical circumstance of the first recipients, and views the way the Gospel was written as embodying the evangelist's reflection of and response to the situation of his Christian community. The historical meaning of the community discourse as the meaning intended by Matthew is intimately related to the Gospel's context of origin. In our interpretation, the discourse is also read from the perspective of the original audience. The two levels of reading, while not incompatible with one another as we shall see in chapters 6-9, are illustrative of the problem of "discovering" the authorial meaning of the gospel text. Historical meaning of a text is essentially a modern reader's construction which is then attributed to the author.

There is a striking similarity between the literary

and social-scientific readings. Both approaches see the process of interpretation as involving the reader's supplying of relevant information. The two interpretations differ by the kind of information needed in order to make sense of the community discourse. In a social-scientific interpretation, the reader supplies the historical information of the Matthean community which is inferred indirectly from the limited internal data. But in our literary interpretation, the information needed is literary. As noted in chapter 2, comprehension of the text is obtained through bridging the narrative gaps present in the discourses. The reader comes to perceive the meaning of humility through understanding the portrayal of Jesus and the disciples in Matthew's narrative, and through perceiving the close connection between the discourse on community life and the parable and eschatological discourses.

Our social-scientific reading is therefore in a sense a form of reader-oriented reading. The reader seeks the *historical* meaning by taking up the position of the author and the original historical audience, but ultimately, the perception of meaning is the reader's construction from his/her interaction with the text.

PART II

Interpreting the Text

Chapter 5

THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY DISCOURSE IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

We begin our interpretation of the community discourse with a detailed study of its narrative context in Matthew's Gospel. This contextual study is, above all, necessary for our literary approach to the discourse, which, as we have put forth in chapter 2, is a "total" reading by a non-virginal reader. As we shall show in the following pages, considerations of the narrative context of the community discourse does offer fresh insights and direction for the (literary) interpretation of the discourse.

The contextual study is also appropriate for a redaction-critical study. It provides a broader synoptic comparison with parallel sayings in their respective Markan and Lukan narrative context, and thus enables the redaction critics to appreciate more deeply Matthew's effort in integrating diverse Jesus tradition into a discourse. For our social-scientific approach, considerations of narrative context of the community discourse, however, appear to be less relevant for the interpretation of the text.

Like the eschatological discourse (Mt 24-25), the discourse on Christian community life is presented as Jesus' speech in response to his disciples' question (18.1b): "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of

heaven?"[1] The temporal setting is simply put as, "At that time (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ) the disciples came to Jesus, saying,...." (18.1a).[2] Further specification of the immediate (narrative) setting for the discourse requires a closer examination of its plausible temporal connection with the preceding events leading up to the disciples coming to Jesus to inquire for the greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

Immediately preceding the question of 18.1b is the episode which depicts Jesus and his disciples arriving at Capernaum. Peter is approached by the collectors of the half-shekel tax, presumably in front of the house at which they are lodging (cf. 17.25b), to enquire whether Jesus would follow the normal custom and pay the half-shekel (17.24). After giving an unqualified "yes," upon entering the house Peter is given a "lesson" by Jesus concerning the temple tax (17.25-27).[3] As it is portrayed in the story, the disciples then pose their question.

I. The Immediate Context

It is plausible that ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ at 18.1 conveys

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[1] From Mt 18.22 on the community discourse represents Jesus' reply to Peter's question on forgiveness (vv 21-35).

[2] Cf. Mt 24.3: When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (NRSV)

[3] That Mt 17.24-27 is about the Jewish temple tax and not Roman imperial taxation (so R.J. Cassidy 1979), see the convincing arguments of Davies and Allison 1991:738-41. See also D.A. Carson 1984:394; D.E. Garland 1987:202-3, R. Bauckham 1986:221-23, and U. Luz 1990:529-31.

a literal temporal sense, "at that time," linking the disciples' question with the dialogue in the preceding temple-tax episode (17.24-27). There are indeed a few textual indications which suggest the plausibility of temporal continuity with the temple-tax episode. (1) Elsewhere in Matthew the phrase ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ signifies literal temporal succession or indicates an important moment of time. In 26.55 ("At that hour Jesus said to the crowds ...") the same phrase carries a chronological sense: after speaking to his disciples who apparently want to defend their master, Jesus addresses the crowds (26.51-54). In 8.13 and 10.19, the expression is used *within* a narrative segment to convey an instance of time ("immediately")[4] or a significant moment in the disciples' witness to Jesus in front of the gentiles.[5] (2) The use of ἄρα in the disciples' question at 18.1, whether it conveys an inferential force, expresses "interest" or concern, or simply enlivens the question, appears to presuppose some antecedent situation.[6]

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[4] Cf. the similar phrase ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης in Mt 9.22; 15.28; 17.18, which are used to express the immediate effect of healing by Jesus.

[5] There are temporal phrases or adverbs in Matthew's narrative that are of no chronological significance, but serve simply as an introduction to the sayings or event: ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ in 11.25; 12.1; 14.1; ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις in 3.1, the same expression but in the singular, 13.1; 22.23; τότε in 9.14; 12.22,38; 15.1; 19.13; 20.20. On different temporal phrases in Matthew's Gospel, see W.G. Thompson 1970:70-71.

[6] See also W.C. Allen 1912:192-93, W.G. Thompson 1970:70-71,73-74, R. Gundry 1982:358-59. On the "logical" use, cf. 19.25: "... Who *then* can be saved?" and 19.27: "... what *then* will we have?" For usage of ἄρα simply to

While the above considerations are inconclusive, a literary reading always assumes some causal or thematic linking between the successive narrated events even if there is no explicit indication of connection between them. The reader is to bridge the apparent narrative "gap" to make sense of the progression of thought in the narrated events.[7]

Thus, in linking chronologically 17.24-27 and 18.1, the other disciples have probably overheard Jesus' brief conversation with Peter concerning the half-shekel tax, and their exemption (at least in principle) from the cultic tax on the ground of their being the sons of God. The status of divine sonship, however, has evoked in them the thought of their ranks in the (future) kingdom of heaven, and they come to Jesus for the question. The disciples' question has elicited from Jesus a lengthy speech on the matter of discipleship in community life.

Furthermore, the temple tax episode is reported to have taken place after Jesus' (second) prediction of his passion. Their juxtaposition probably signifies some

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enliven the question (non-inferential), see perhaps 24.45: "Who *then* is the faith and wise servant ..." See W. Bauer et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1979), s.v. ἄρα; J.D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (1934), 32-43.

[7] This narrative "gap" or "blank" constitutes what Wolfgang Iser calls the narrative "structure" that regulates (but not formulates) the interaction between text and the reader. On the most fundamental form, this narrative gap is seen on the level of story. See Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), esp. 182-96. Thus on the level of story, the narrative gap between 17.24-27 and 18.1 requires a response from the reader to supply the "missing link" in the narrative flow.

interrelation between the two "events." The episodic nature then creates another narrative gap for the reader to supply some linkage between these two events. Thus there is the further question: what significance do these incidents have for perceiving the question of the disciple? In particular, what do these words of Jesus in his passion prediction and the temple-tax episode contribute to the meaning of humility which forms the subject of the bulk of Jesus speech? As we shall see in the next chapter, considerations of the immediate context of the community discourse indicate a direction for construing the meaning of the humility required of discipleship. However, a fuller appreciation of the meaning of humility is possible when the discourse is related with its wider narrative context.

II. The Broader Context

1. *The Narrative Context of Conflict between Jesus and his Disciples*

From chapters 11-23 Matthew's story is centred about Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders and with his own disciples, with chapter 11 sounding the note of general unbelief within Israel. Starting from chapter 12 the story develops through conflicts; in the narrative section 12.1-16.12, the story is evolved primarily through Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders.[8]

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[8] The parable discourse in this narrative section does not "drive" the story forward, but indicates the causes of unbelief, hostility and opposition to Jesus' ministry, with the message actually directed to the reader.

Within the "story of conflict" with the Jewish leaders, there is a parallel portrayal of the disciples faithfully following Jesus. In this narrative section, the disciples are represented as the faithful among an unbelieving nation, but the portrayal paints a "mixed" picture of the disciples. The disciples demonstrate their faith in Jesus by their following, and show some signs of understanding Jesus' teaching (cf. 13.51; 16.12). Yet the faith of the followers is that of "little faith" - a lack of complete trust in Jesus in times of danger or need when they have been witnessing to Jesus' power all along.[9]

As the story develops further, the disciples have come further into the foreground. Beginning from the scene in the region of Caesarea Philippi (16.13ff), the centre of the story has shifted temporarily from Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders to Jesus' interaction with his own disciples,[10] a plot that is to portray another aspect of the "failure" of the disciples. As we shall see below, 16.13-20.28 depicts a series of "conflicts" between Jesus and his own disciples, centred around Jesus' three-fold

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[9] Cf. the two feeding episodes, esp. the second feeding of four thousand which shows a faith of disciples that amounts almost to "blindness" when they have experienced the miraculous in Jesus' first feeding. Similarly, representative of other disciples, Peter shows his "little faith" in the "boat incident" in 14.22-33. Related to the feeding stories is also the disciples' inadequate faith depicted in 16.1-12; cf. also 17.14-20 on the disciples' inability to heal the epileptic boy. See D.J. Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader" (1992).

[10] The conflict with the Jewish leaders resumes upon Jesus' entering into Jerusalem, culminated in his arrest and trial before the high priest: 21.12-23.39; 26.47-68.

predictions of his passion and resurrection.

Jesus' first prediction of his suffering, death and resurrection (16.21) follows after Peter's acknowledgement of faith (16.16, cf. v 20). The expression ἀπὸ τότε ("from that time on") in 16.21 does not necessarily imply temporal continuity, but, apart from its forward-looking, it points back to the time of Peter's confession. By the back-reference the phrase makes clear that Jesus' words on his destiny are explication of his understanding of "messiahship" - what his mission as the messiah would entail.

Jesus' words evoke a response from Peter expressing a strong sense of disbelief,[11] which, presumably, is also what is in the mind of the rest of the disciples.[12] Peter's words, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you" (16.22b, NRSV), underline not only a belief in a messiah of restoration which he and the other disciples share,[13] but also their aspiration in a "discipleship" that looks

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[11] Mt 16.22a pictures the horrified Peter who could not contain himself in hearing what Jesus said about himself: "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him ..." (NRSV).

[12] In 16.24a, Jesus is portrayed as speaking to all of his disciples: "Then Jesus spoke to his disciples."

[13] There is probably no "standard" conception of "messiah" before the first Jewish war; see M. de Jonge 1966; J. Neusner 1984; J. Neusner et al 1987. In view of Peter's response and later the request of the mother of the Zebedee brothers (20.20-21), a popular "messianic" expectation of a Davidic king to restore Israel politically and spiritually is part of the Jewish religion in the Jewish world created by the gospel story, probably reflecting some popular Jewish messianic sentiment in the early first-century Judaism. Cf. Pss Sol 17.23-51; 18.6-10; See R.A. Horsley 1984, 1987.

forward to status and power which would be theirs from following the messiah (cf. 20.20f). Behind Peter's rebuke is perhaps the realization that "An unwelcome fate awaits anyone who faithfully follows a suffering leader."[14] At this reaction from Peter, Jesus began to teach his disciples about the true meaning of discipleship (16.24-28). The series of incidents may be summarized as follows:

Jesus' first prediction of passion/resurrection,
Disciples' response (represented by Peter),
Jesus' instructions concerning discipleship.

For reasons that will become clear shortly, we shall suspend the narrative order and turn to Jesus' third passion/resurrection prediction (20.17-19).[15] This prediction is followed by a scene which depicts the mother of the Zebedee brothers coming to Jesus to request on behalf of her sons for high position in his kingdom, and the subsequent dialogue between Jesus and the two disciples (20.20-23). In this incident the other (ten) disciples are portrayed as having heard the dialogue and become furious with the two brothers (20.24). Unable to accept Jesus' conception of a "suffering messiah," they have brushed aside the gloomy picture of Jesus' prediction of his suffering and prefer to think of the glorious future associated with the messiah's kingdom. Thus through their own words the disciples have shown themselves to be self-concerned, with a mind which is set on precedence and

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[14] D.E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (1993), 180.

[15] It will be recalled from discussion in ch. 2 of readership that our reading is not a first-time, consecutive reading.

power.[16] The event provides another occasion for Jesus to teach his disciples on discipleship (20.25-28). We have the following narrative flow:

(1) Prediction of passion/resurrection,
(2) The Request of the Zebedee brothers and further dialogue,
(3) Jesus' instruction on discipleship regarding leadership.

When we come to Jesus' second prediction in 17.22f, a similar pattern appears. At Jesus' second prediction, the disciples react in great grief (17.23b). Apparently, they now realize the seriousness of Jesus' words about his sufferings. As yet, there is no indication that they come to understand why the messiah has to suffer such a fate,[17] apparently neglecting or not comprehending Jesus' words about his resurrection.[18] The events narrated after the (second) prediction bear a striking formal resemblance to the event subsequent to the third prediction. (1) As it is portrayed in the story, the coming and request of the mother of the Zebedee brothers occurs after the third prediction with subsequent conversation between Jesus and the two disciples, so following the second prediction is the coming of the half-shekel collectors and the ensuing

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[16] Cf. also the same concern expressed by Peter in Mt 19.27: "Then Peter said in reply, Look, we have left everything and followed you. When then will we have?" (NRSV); and Jesus' admonition to his disciples in 23.8-12.

[17] U. Luz, *Das Evangelium Nach Mathäus* 8-17 (1990), 527.

[18] F.W. Beare 1981:370; D.A. Carson 1984:393; D.E. Garland 1993:185.

exchange between Jesus and Peter.[19] (2) In both the second and third prediction narrative cycles, there are the twin elements of dialogue (17.24-27; 20.20-23) and the question/ reaction from the disciples (18.1; 20.24). We have the following sequence of events:

(1) Jesus' prediction of his death/resurrection,
(2) Disciples react in grief,
(3) The temple-tax episode and the disciples' question,
(4) Jesus' instruction (the community discourse).

Thus in 16.13-20.28 the threads of the story are linked to form a three-fold narrative cycle in 16.21-28; 17.22-18.35 and 20.17-28. Each cycle begins with Jesus' prediction of his passion, followed by the disciples' response (as in the first prediction), or by a dialogue initiated by question/request (as in the second and third prediction cycle), and ends in Jesus teaching his disciples. The narration exhibits a common pattern:

prediction of passion/resurrection
response/dialogue
instructions.[20]

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[19] There are respective temporal gaps between Jesus' prediction and the next portrayed event: 17.22f and 24; 20.17-19 and 20. Τότε at 20.20 does not necessarily imply temporal succession with the preceding event.

[20] In his *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community* (1970), 85-99, cf. also 16, Thompson has recognized the prediction-instruction pattern that underlies Mt 16.21-28; 17.22-18.35, and 20.17-28. However, Thompson has failed to perceive the implications of the narrative flow in the first and third narrative prediction-instruction cycles for the temporal continuity in 17.22-24 and 18.1. See the discussion below. Furthermore, the seemingly similar stylistic "introduction" and "temporal expression" found in 8.1-17 and 17.22-18.1, being far apart in their narrative context and content, is irrelevant to the consideration of possible temporal continuity in 17.24-18.1. See further discussion below.

Three important implications can be drawn which are relevant to the interpretation of the community discourse. (1) In the third prediction narrative cycle, the request for precedence in Jesus' kingdom infuriates the other disciples. It is therefore most probable that in the second prediction cycle, the short dialogue between Jesus and Peter (17.25b-27) - implying the disciples of Jesus being the sons of God - triggers the rest of the disciples to inquire of their relative ranks in the future kingdom (18.1). At 20.24 it is explicitly stated that the other ten disciples *have heard (ἀκούσαντες)* the dialogues with Jesus, so it is likely (if only implicitly) that the other disciples have heard the half-shekel collectors speaking with Peter and also the conversation between Peter and Jesus. Their question (18.1) is therefore the temporal sequel to the temple-tax episode. Within this broader narrative perspective, the temporal phrase ("at this time") and the Greek particle ἄρα become more credible as connecting links with the preceding temple-tax incident.[21]

(2) In this part of the narrative, the disciples are portrayed in a dark light. Their failure in discipleship shows up as an orientation of mind towards things of the world so that concern with the future life is also tainted with the earthly outlook. The conflict between Jesus and his disciples is accordingly one that arises from different evaluative points of view, characterized by a thinking

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[21] See the discussion of the "immediate context" in the above section.

which is centred either on God or men (or self, cf. 16.23). On each occasion Jesus' instruction represents his endeavour to resolve the "conflict" by imparting to his disciples the right point of view.

(3) Being an integral part of the narrative flow, the community discourse naturally needs to be read in the light of its narrative context, in particular in the light of the portrayals of the disciples and other characters in the story. As we shall see in the literary reading of the discourse in the following chapters, the characterization of the disciples is an important narrative feature that informs the meaning of humility in Jesus' speech.

2. *Connection with the Parable Discourse*

The parable discourse is set in the narrative context of Israel's general lack of response to Jesus' preaching and, in particular, of Jesus' conflicts with the Jewish leaders. On the story level, the overall thrust of the parable discourse is the explanation of the failure of Israel to accept her messiah.[22] On the other hand, like the community discourse, the parable discourse speaks past the audience to the reader about the post-Easter Christian community which faces a similar reality as it is portrayed in Jesus' conflict with Israel. In particular the parable of the sower speaks of the similar response of the world to the preaching of the post-Easter community of Jesus. The parable of the tares addresses a "mixed" community

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[22] See, e.g., Davies/Allison, *Matthew* (1991), 374-75; Garland, *Reading Matthew* (1993), 144-46; M. Davies, *Matthew* (1993), 99, 101.

consisting of true and false disciples; the work of the devil is partly responsible for this state of affairs present in Jesus' kingdom (Mt 13.36-43).[23]

As we have seen in chapter 1, the community discourse also contains Jesus' words which displays a similar post-Easter perspective; the discourse depicts some kind of "conflicts" within the post-Easter Christian community.

In view of this similarity between the two discourses in the narrative context ("conflicts") and perspective - in the story and narrative level, the parable discourse may serve as a further narrative context for understanding the discourse on community life.

III. Discourses Within the Plot of Matthew's Narrative

The discourse gains a further perspective when it is read in the light of the "plot" of the story. As it is employed here, the notion of plot is not simply the "flow of narrative."[24] The plot of a story is understood here as

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[23] This contextual incongruity is most prominent in the interpretations of the parables of the sower and of the tares among the wheat, Mt 13.18-23,36-43. These texts speak past the audience in the narrative to the reader of a time of persecution because of faith in Jesus, of apostasy, and the Christian community as a "mixed" body of true and false disciples. See Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (1988), 108-9.

[24] In *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), R. Scholes and R. Kellogg regard the plot as an "outline of events," an "articulation of the skeleton of narrative" (12). Similarly, in describing ancient Graeco-Roman "novels," Graham Anderson (*Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World* [1984], 2-3) and John Morgan (*The Greek Fiction* [1994], 2-3) understand plot as an account of the story-line. Richard Edwards adopts this common notion of plot in his *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (1985): to "follow the development of the plot or the flow of narrative" (p. 9).

the structure of the verbal and physical actions of the characters so that the story acquires a sense of direction and an overall meaning.[25] Applied to the Gospel of Matthew, this understanding of the plot therefore means that the plot connotes a governing principle or plotting theme which structures the actions and words of Jesus into a coherent narrative and imparts the story with a direction and an overall meaning.[26] Thus to have perceived the plot of Matthew's story is to recognize the relations among its parts, and to appreciate what Matthew's story is all about. The notion of plot, as it is understood here, then, already implies an overall understanding of Matthew's narrative which is the result of retrospection *after* several readings of the Gospel. When the plot of the gospel story has been grasped, one has also come to apprehend its message and the significance of the narrated events.

As we have seen in chapter 1 (pp. 10-11 and nn.13,14), several formulations of the plot of Matthew's Gospel have been proposed, but they all fail to incorporate the major discourses into the plot of the story. This is a common failure among the narrative critics who, in their preoccupation with the "story line," have missed the role

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See also Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (1988), 2, for similar conception.

[25] See M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1981), 137-39; R.S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot" (1966); Kieran Egan, "What is a Plot?" (1978); Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (1984), ch. 1 and the preface.

[26] See also D.B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (1990), 110-11. Mark Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (1994), 33-35.

and function of Jesus' teaching discourses in the plot of the story.

Despite his failure to incorporate the major discourses into the plot of Matthew's story, Mark Powell's construction of the Matthean plot has, in my judgment, shown a deeper appreciation of what Matthew's story of Jesus is all about than that of most other narrative critics.[27] Following Powell, Matthew's story may be construed to consist of the *main* plot which is God's plan of salvation and Satan's striving to thwart the divine purpose, and two *subplots* of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders and with his own disciples, which are understood to have the Devil behind the scenes. Thus, the gospel story is in reality a "cosmic battle" between God's agent, Jesus, and Satan, fought on the human realm.[28] As unwitting agents of Satan, both the Jewish leaders and the disciples contribute each in their own way to their obstruction of God's plan to save people from their sins, the former through their opposition to Jesus and the latter in their attempt to discourage Jesus from treading the way of God as well as in their self-concern and thinking in human terms. As it is portrayed in the story, Jesus lost the conflict with the Jewish leaders but, ironically, it is in losing that Jesus has brought about the redemption of

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[27] Powell, "The plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel" (1992). As we shall see, Powell's construction can be expanded to incorporate the five discourses into the plot of Matthew's story.

[28] Along this line of interpretation, see also R.A. Edwards 1985:11-19,27,49,60-61; B.D. Howell 1990:98-99.

sins for humankind through his death and resurrection.[29]

With Jesus' resurrection and his subsequent commission of universal mission, the plotting of the story enters a new phase in the post-Easter era in which the discourses play a leading role in the divine plan of salvation. Having lost the major battle, Satan continues his attempts to thwart the divine purpose, as it is reflected in the *continuing* unbelief of the Jewish leaders and the "little faith" of Jesus' disciples at the end of the story. (1) In fabricating the tale that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body, the Jewish leaders remain "blind" to the divine purpose and continue to obstruct Israel from coming to faith in Jesus (28.11-15). (2) In facing the difficulties of everyday life, the disciples continue to (a) show their fragile faith and (b) see things from a human point of view.[30] In this phase of the "cosmic battle" in the period after Jesus' resurrection, the Evil One attempts to derail God's salvation by hindering the preaching of the "word of the kingdom" and working havoc within the community of Jesus through "planting his sons" as stumbling-blocks in the community of Jesus' disciples.[31]

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[29] Cf. Mt 1.21; 9.10-13; 20.28; 26.28.

[30] On disciples' worldly thinking, see Mt 18.1; 19.27; 20.20-28; cf. 23.8-12. There is no indication in the gospel narrative that the disciples have undergone a drastic change in their evaluative point of view at the end of the story.

[31] The post-Easter situations are portrayed in part of the parable of the sower about the destructive work of the "evil one" (Mt 13.19), and especially in the parable of the tares and its explanation (13.24-30,36-43). On demonic attack on the community of Jesus, see also 16.18.

The purpose of the gospel narrative is to counteract Satan's destructive work within Jesus' community through narrating the story of Jesus that shows the salvific purpose of God. Into the time extending beyond the plotted story of Jesus emerges another story. In this story, the disciples now become the chief actors. The disciples will proclaim the "gospel of the kingdom" just as Jesus has done before them (4.24; 24.14). They will experience the same hostility and opposition from the world in the preaching of the gospel (10.17f; 24.9). Despite fuller understanding of the nature of Jesus' messianic mission, they themselves display a similar state of mind as the pre-Easter disciples (in the story). The narrative context of the community discourse indicates that the disciples' human thinking may indeed provide the reader with the insight into the reality of the degree of faith among Jesus' disciples in the post-Easter Christian community.

In the post-Easter community, the "conflict" between the resurrected Jesus and his disciples, which results from the disciples' seeing things with a human point of view instead of seeing with God, remains to be resolved. It is through the discourses the risen Jesus continues with his unfinished task of teaching his (post-Easter) disciples the right way of perceiving things.

Contrary to Mark Powell,[32] Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount and the discourse on community life are a means through which the (post-Easter) disciples of Jesus

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[32] *What is Narrative Criticism?* (1990), 46.

will be saved from their sins (1.21), in the sense that obedience to Jesus' words will lead them away from sins and his words are the "path" to the kingdom of heaven.[33] The disciples are to learn what Jesus has taught and are to live accordingly (28.19f).

Furthermore, Jesus' words are a means through which Jesus' (post-Easter) disciples may experience his "presence." By consistently portraying the disciples addressing Jesus' as "Lord" (κύριε),[34] the reading experience may already have induced a *narrative* experience of being with Jesus. The discourses' double features of lengthy narrative time (and hence reading time), and Jesus speaking past the audience in the narrative to the reader, however, would together create a more intense experience of being addressed by Jesus, hence a particular experience of encountering the risen Jesus in his words.[35] Indeed, this presence of the risen Jesus in his words is made explicit at the conclusion of the gospel narrative when Jesus says to his disciples that in their teaching his words to new believers, he will be in their midst (28.19f). But it is in the actual practising of Jesus' teaching, as found

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[33] Mt 5.20; 7.13-14,15-27; 13.3-9,18-23; 18.2-4,5-9,21-35; 28.19f; cf. also 22.1-14.

[34] The only exception is with Judas who betrayed Jesus into the hands of the temple authority (26.49:χαῖρε ῥαββί).

[35] In his *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel* (1988), 133, David Bauer has made the connection between the five discourses and Jesus' presence with his disciples. However, Bauer does not suggest the way this "spiritual" presence is realized in the disciples' experience. See also D.B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (1990), 173-74.

primarily in the Sermon on the Mount and the community discourse, that the disciples will find the constant presence of the risen Jesus. This presentness in his words will be the way the risen Jesus mediates his presence to his disciples until the time when he comes in glory (24.29-31; cf. 26.29).

Thus within the plot of the story, the discourses are the chief means through which Jesus' post-Easter disciples continue to experience deliverance from their sins and the "presence" of the risen Jesus. And it is through Jesus' words that the Christian community is able to withstand the Devil's onslaught (cf. 16.18).

IV. Concluding Remarks

(1) Our reading of 16.13-20.28 indicates the importance of historical knowledge for reading an ancient text like Matthew's Gospel. The text has its repertoire, a framework of beliefs, values, religious practices prevalent in the "world" in the narrative which is an illustrative representation of the world of the author.[36] Thus, the incident described in 17.24-27 is comprehensible when the tax payment is understood as the annual (Jewish) temple tax prevalent in the first century Jewry. The narrative never explains what the half-shekel tax (17.24) is; the reader must supply it himself in order to understand the gospel story. Similarly, the reaction of Peter to Jesus'

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[36] On a comprehensive discussion of repertoire of a text, see W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), ch. 3.

prediction of his suffering as the messiah and the request of the Zebedee brothers for high rank in Jesus' kingdom are understandable when the reader has some knowledge of Jewish "messianic" beliefs or expectations current among "average" Jews or in different groups of Jews in second-temple Judaism. Comprehension of the text therefore presupposes a common framework shared between the text and reader, which implies the reader's familiarity with the Jewish scripture and other first-century Jewish writings.

(2) The community discourse gains the narrative perspective when it is read in the light of the "conflict" between Jesus and his disciples in evaluative point of view. The discourse is the instruction part of the second prediction narrative cycle which forms part of this conflict. The characterization of Jesus and the disciples as portrayed in this "conflict story" becomes an important "interpretive lens" for viewing the discourse on community life.

As we have see in chapter 1, since the Matthean discourses are referential, the interrelatedness between the community discourse and the characterization of the disciples implies that the portrayal of the disciples is an index to the reality of discipleship in the post-Easter Christian community.

(3) On the wider perspective, the discourses form the essential elements of the plot of the Gospel, which is, according to our construction, God's salvation for mankind through Jesus his Son and the devil's continued opposition

to thwart the divine purpose. The discourses mediate the presence of the risen Jesus, and function to impart to the reader the true essence of discipleship in order to counteract the Devil's destructive work operative within the Christian community.

Chapter 6

INTERPRETATION OF MT 18.1-4

A LITERARY READING

The literary reading of 18.1-4 in this chapter is organized into three sections. It begins with the identification of a plausible text-segment (vv 1-4). As we recall from the methodological discussion of literary reading in chapter 2, verses 1-4 are first seen from the perspective of the disciples in the "world" of Matthew's narrative. Set against this understanding of the disciples is the comprehension of Jesus' words as perceived by the (modern) reader. The contrast will provide insight into the process of meaning-construction in a literary reading.[1]

I. The Flow of Thought

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the community discourse comprises Jesus' instructions to his disciples in the second of the prediction-dialogue-instruction cycles which portray the "conflict" between Jesus and his disciples. Occurring as a single speech spoken at a particular time and place, it is, therefore, most probable that the community discourse is so structured that its various parts are interrelated to form a *unified* speech.[2] The discourse should, then, exhibit a certain degree of

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[1] This presentational format on literary interpretation will be followed in the rest of the chapters in Part II.

[2] See also R. Gundry, *Matthew* (1982), 358.

cohesion, and progression of thought as well as organization of themes (thematization).[3] Indeed, "missing links" will always be supplied to connect meaningfully a succession of sentences or narrative segments (even if the relation between them is not overtly obvious) so that some continuity or progression of thought in the discourse may be made out.[4] The discourse begins with Jesus' demand of humility for his disciples in 18.1-4, and the rest of Jesus' speech is organized around the theme to delineate various expressions of humility.[5]

The division of the discourse into four semantic units (vv 1-4, 5-9, 10-20 and 21-35) is simply expressing our perception of the progression of thought and thematization in the discourse. This fourfold division is based primarily on the following considerations: (1) the presence of recurrent key words which serve as cohesive ties, (2) the narrative pattern in the Gospel that binds the sayings into expressing a theme, and (3) the flow of thought in the sense of the progression and expansion of the preceding

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[3] On formation of a continuous text from a modern point of view, see Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (1996), 80-90.

[4] On the interaction between text and reader, see W. Iser, "Interaction between Text and Reader" (1980). See also Roger Fowler 1996:82-83.

[5] At 18.21, Jesus is interrupted by Peter's question on forgiveness, and the rest of the discourse after this point is Jesus' reply to the question. This "narrative" character of the discourse is more prominent in the parable discourse. Apart from change of audience and setting (13.1-3a,10,36), short conversations between Jesus and his disciples are present thrice in the parable discourse (13.10,36,51f).

thought. It will be shown in the paragraphs below that on these considerations, 18.1-4 forms a semantic unit in setting out the theme of humility, with v 5 forming a transition to the next set of sayings (vv 6-9) which convey an expression of humility in the experience of community life of Jesus' disciples.

A characteristic feature of the community discourse is the recurrence of a succession of key words. In 18.1-4 and 5, we have two sets of recurrent expressions. The first is παιδίον/παιδία; the other is the Matthean diction ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.[6] The words child/children occur in vv 2-5. Thus if we consider the connection of thought by catchwords, it appears that v 5, with the child imagery, marks the end of Jesus' *immediate* reply to his disciples' question.[7]

On the other hand, it is the phrase "kingdom of heaven" (in vv 1,3,4) which actually forms the *inclusio* to the question and reply: v 4 answers the question of the disciples in v 1 by repeating the words of the question.[8]

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[6] Recurrent key words in 18.6-14: οἱ μικροί, σκανδαλίζειν; vv 15-35: ἀδελφός; vv 10-35: ὁ πατὴρ μου/ ὑμῶν ἐν οὐραοῖς, ὁ πατὴρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος.

[7] So the "paragraph division" in the 26th and 27th edition of the Nestle Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, the NA *Synopsis* (13th ed), the new English translation, NRSV (but not RSV). See also New Testament commentators, among others, A.H. McNeile 1915:259-61; E. Schweizer 1975:360-63; J.P. Meier 1979:128-29; R. Schnackenburg 1988:272-73; F.D. Bruner 1990:633-37; D.E. Garland 1993:188; Davies and Allison 1991:750,752

[8] So W.G. Thompson 1970:105-7; D.A. Carson 1984:397; D.J. Harrington 1991:264-65; D.A. Hagner 1995:516. See also D.B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (1990), 147.

This framing structure in a *dialogue* is a favourite narrative style in Matthew's Gospel;[9] in fact, the word ἀφεῖναι (to forgive) forms another *inclusio* in the dialogue in 18.21-35.

Consideration of the flow of thought also supports the view that vv 1-4 form Jesus' immediate reply to the disciples' question. The thought in these verses may be encapsulated as follows:

> Question on greatness in the kingdom
> Symbolic action with a child
> Entrance saying
> Humbling like this child.

Jesus' symbolic action forms his initial response to the question (v 2). Verses 3-4 explain the symbolism: fundamental to the way of life for the disciples is humility before God, embodied in the child, which is both the condition for entering the kingdom of heaven and the divine criterion of "greatness."

The continuing of the child imagery in v 5 constitutes a transition from humility as a quality (demanded by God) to one of its expressions: "receiving" one such child and not to cause him to "stumble" (v 6). That vv 5f belong together is further indicated by the syntactical construction ὃς ἐὰν ... ὃς δέ. The adversative particle expresses the contrasting actions of "receiving" and

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[9] See the question and answer in the *dialogues* in 12.10,12; 13.10,13; 19.3,9; 21.23,27. Cf. also 16.6,11 (v 11 redactional), which is not Jesus' answer to a question but nonetheless exhibits the framing structure in Jesus' speech. See W.G. Thompson, *Matthew's Advice to A Divided Community* (1970), 80.

"stumbling" in vv 5f.[10]

Thus, in our view, although at first sight vv 1-5 are unified by children imagery, the narrative pattern and flow of thought are judged to be more significant than the mere recurrent of key words in the determination of whether vv 1-4 or 1-5 form a proper unit of thought.

II. The Understanding of the Disciples in the Narrative

This is essentially a construction of the disciples' understanding of Jesus' words *as characters* in the gospel story. The disciples' comprehension is partially similar to a first, sequential, reading experience of the Gospel,[11] since as participants in the story world the disciples' understanding of the "present" event is necessarily linear, dependent upon their recalling past "relevant" events and appreciating their significance for the present. In terms of communication, the meaning of a dialogue as perceived by

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[10] The ὃς ἐὰν ... ὃς δέ construction is also found in Mt 5.19; 12.32; 16.25; 23.16; 23.18; see Thompson 1970:105-6. Furthermore, in the *reported speech* of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, καί is not decisive in indicating that a saying which begins with καί belongs to a preceding narrative segment. Καί can simply introduce another (related) theme, as in 6.5: Καὶ ὅταν προσεύχησθε .... As a stylistic variation, apart from the more common δέ Matthew also begins a sentence on a new subject matter with καί: see, e.g., 4.23; 8.14; 9.9; 9.35; 13.10; 15.21; 16.1; 17.1; 19.3; 20.17,29; 21.1; 24.1. We therefore disagree with R. Schnackenburg ("Großsein im Gottesreich zu Mt 18,1-5" [1988], 272-73), who argues that 18.5 belongs to 18.1-4 by appealing to (among other considerations) the use of καί in v 5 as an obvious syntactical indicator that the verse is connected with 18.1-4.

[11] A "virginal" reading of the gospel narrative is exemplified in R.A. Edwards's reader-oriented reading of Matthew's Gospel in his *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (1985).

the participants is dependent upon their common "background," each bringing their common cultural assumptions to bear upon the conversation and its understanding in a particular context of utterance.[12] Thus the disciples' comprehension is conditioned by the immediate context of the discourse situated in the broader context of culture - namely, that of an early first-century Jewish world as it is represented in the gospel narrative.

The coming of the disciples to Jesus in 18.1 is depicted as the sequel to the temple-tax incident. The narration suggests that the other disciples had overheard the brief conversation between Jesus and Peter.[13] It is, however, not evident that they understood the significance of Jesus' words (17.25-27). If they were free from the temple tax because they were sons of God, why were other Jews apparently liable to the tax? Were they not sons of God[14] as well and hence, according to Jesus ("the sons are

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[12] On meaning and understanding as occurring within a cultural background of assumptions and practices, see John Searle, "The Background of Meaning" (1980), and "Literary Theory and Discontents" (1994), esp. 639-42. On communication and context, see also Roger Fowler 1996:111-16.

[13] On the temporal continuity and progression of thought between 17.24-27 and 18.1, see the contextual discussion of the community discourse in ch. 5.

[14] The use of "son(s) of God" in Matthew's narrative (5.9,45; 27.40-43) indicates that the Jews in the world of Matthew's narrative (which is illustrative of the Jewish social world of the gospel author) are conscious that Israelites as the people of God are God's sons. See, e.g., Dt 7.6-9; 14.1; Ex 4.22-23; Jer 31.6-9; Hos 11.1; cf. also Sir 36.12; Jub 1.24-25; 4 Ezra 6.58; Abot 3.14 (deriving from Dt 14.1). But in Wisd 2.12-20; 5.5 (cf. 5.1); Sir 4.10, only the righteous Israelites are called sons of God. On God addressed as "Father," cf. Tob 13.4; Sir 23.1,4; Wisd 14.3.

free"), should also be exempt? Instead, they came with a different concern; being the sons of God, who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ? (18.1)

In view of their previous "confession" of Jesus as the messiah of Israel (16.13-20), in their question the disciples have probably the (future) "messianic kingdom" in view. The belief is later representatively expressed by the mother of the Zebedee brothers when she spoke of the "kingdom of Jesus" (20.21).[15] Whether any corresponding thought of a messianic kingdom is implied in Jesus' reply, the kingdom of heaven in his words does carry a future connotation. In v 3 the kingdom of heaven to which one enters is clearly the future kingdom.[16] Since v 4 is closely related to v 3, the kingdom in v 4 has also a future meaning. This is confirmed by the fact that v 4 is

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[15] Matthew's narrative depicts a first-century Jewish world in which belief of and aspiration for Davidic messiah to bring about the restoration of Israel is part of the Jewish religion. (1) The infancy narrative is pervaded with a "messianic" overtone: the birth of Jesus is heralded by the gentile magi as the one born of the king of the Jews (2.2); king Herod is suspicious of such a would-be-king or messiah (ὁ χριστός) and makes enquiry of his provenance (2.3-6). (2) John the Baptist expects a "coming one" to bring in the eschatological judgment (3.11f; cf. 11.2f). (3) The crowd's doubting question about Jesus being the son of David (12.23). (4) The Jewish leaders expects the messiah to come from the son of David (22.41-45). (5) Jesus is mocked and executed as the "king of the Jews" (27.27-31, 37).

[16] The future sense of entering into the kingdom of heaven is clear in the use of double negative with aorist subjunctive: οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε; see F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R.W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (1961), § 365 (hereafter referred to as BDF). The future kingdom is also in view in other "entrance" sayings, 5.20; 7.21; 19.23f; 21.31.

Jesus' reply to the disciples' question in v 1.[17]

The disciples' question reflects their over-confidence: they are certain that as followers of Jesus the messiah, they will be assured a place in the future kingdom. While this is not the first time Jesus has issued a warning of divine rejection (cf. 5.20; 7.21-23), the stern warning (18.3) in the face of a question which takes "salvation" as a matter of course must have shocked the disciples to the heart.

The disciples were equally shocked by Jesus' reply on "greatness." They were directed to perceive that true greatness before God is humility, a humility which is embodied in children. In Jewish society and indeed the Hellenistic Roman world in general, children were regarded as immature in their lack of intelligence and wisdom.[18] This social image of children is perhaps implied in the disciples' slighting attitude towards the children, as

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[17] For the futuristic use of the present (ἐστιν), see BDF § 323. At 5.19; 8.11, the same expression "in the kingdom of heaven" has the futuristic, local sense. For other "kingdom" expressions conveying similar future sense, see "in the kingdom of their Father" (13.43), "in your kingdom" (20.21), "in my Father's kingdom" (26.29). In 16.28 ("the Son of Man coming in his kingdom"), εν denotes not a spatial sense but accompaniment: the coming of the Son of Man *with* his kingly power. On 11.11 see n. 35 below. Although we do not concur with John O'Neill ("The Kingdom of God" [1993]) in perceiving a *local* sense of "kingdom of God" in the epistles of Paul (e.g. Rom 14.17; 1 Cor 4.20), the "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew's Gospel, with possible exceptions at 5.3,10; 13.44f (envisaging "kingdom" as something to be possessed), does imply a rule of God over an area or a people - in heaven and in the future extending to the whole earth. Against J. Marcus, "Entering into the Kingly Power of God" (1988), see John O'Neill 1993.

[18] See παῖς in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, esp. 638-47.

described in a later incident (19.13-15). Thus, the disciples would understand that Jesus did not have in view the "quality" of children, but their dependency as well as social insignificance: their reliance upon parents for protection and sustenance and the obvious duty of obedience. The disciples would then understand the humility Jesus is speaking of in terms of trust, reliance and submission to God. What God values is this childlike humility!

It is not clear what impression these words of Jesus would have made upon the disciples. For, while on various occasions the disciples are portrayed as coming to understand Jesus' teaching *after* his explanation[19] - an understanding which is in line with part of their later commission to teach new converts (28.20), they are shown repeatedly as failing to understand Jesus' messiahship to involve suffering and self-sacrificial death,[20] and deep down in their hearts they persisted in thinking of greatness in terms of prestige and power. The latter disposition is revealed in their speech and question: Peter's response to Jesus' first prediction of his suffering and death ("God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you," 16.22), and after the discourse, in their

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[19] See Mt 13.51 (cf. 13.16); 16.12; 17.13. In 15.15-21 the disciples' understanding is implied after Jesus' explanation.

[20] Mt 16.21-23; 17.22-23; 20.17-28. Cf. also 26.47-56, portraying Jesus speaking of his arrest as the fulfilment of the scripture, and the forsaking of the disillusioned disciples at Jesus' self-surrender to the crowds coming for his arrest.

slighting attitude towards children (19.13-15). Their evaluative point of view is also shown in their longing for material rewards in following Jesus (19.27), and in the Zebedee brothers' request (through their mother) for status and power in Jesus' kingdom (20.20-28). The ἄρα in their question at 18.1, then, probably underlines a concern for rank and power.

III. The Understanding of the Reader

The above reading is a construction of how the disciples would have understood Jesus' words in a *dialogical* situation. Their apprehension of past events and Jesus' words is limited by the "existential" situation that they themselves are participants in the story world, constituting part of the on-gong "events." It is therefore not surprising if they could not fully grasp the significance of Jesus' words. For the reader who reads from the post-Easter perspective of faith, his/her reading of Jesus' words will be more perceptive than the disciples in the narrative.

1. *Humility and the Temple-Tax Incident*

Within 18.1-4 itself, the meaning of humility is related only through the symbolism of children. And the reader is encouraged to see, with the disciples in the narrative, "humility" in terms of inner disposition of trust and obedience to God. But the reader looks over the "shoulder of the disciples," and comprehends the opening words of Jesus from a wider literary context.

While the temple-tax episode is temporally linked to the coming of the disciples, in terms of progression and cohesion of thought there appears an apparent lack of thematic connection with 18.1-4. How are vv 1-4, with their theme of humility (denoted by ταπεινοῦν), related to the preceding event (17.22-27)? And against a broader context, how is the desired quality of humility of the disciples related to their overall conduct as portrayed in the narrative?

In the words of Wolfgang Iser: "each textual segment does not carry its own determinacy within itself, but will gain this in relation to other segments."[21] For the reader seeking fuller comprehension of the passage, 18.1-4 presents an instance of what Iser calls a narrative gap in the gospel story, a "textual blank" which marks an apparent lack of connection between textual segments. The gaps thus call for perception of connection between the present text and some other relevant text-segments into a larger organized whole that exhibits a certain narrative perspective. The narrative gap "disappears" when the "missing links" have been perceived.[22] The deeper appreciation of the meaning of humility will then emerge at the construal of "joints" linking 18.1-4 with other

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[21] W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), 195; see also p. 196 and n.24 there.

[22] W. Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1972), 284-85; "Interaction between Text and Reader" (1980), 110-15. A more detailed delineation of the "structure" and function of textual blanks is presented in Iser's The *Act of Reading* (1978), 182-203.

relevant narrative segments in the gospel story.

Since the reader is not a "virginal" reader,[23] he/she is capable of comprehending a span of the text from the "total" context of the story, limited only by his/her competence as a reader in keeping track of every detail of the gospel narrative and perceiving their interrelated-ness in a meaningful way. In the first place, the reader comes to the text (18.1-4) with a perception of the humility of Jesus in connection with temple-tax obligation. Secondly, as humility is required of discipleship, the overall portrayal of disciples in the gospel story is recognized to have important bearing upon the meaning of humility in 18.1-4. This perception is reinforced by the plot of the story that the discourse is situated in the context of the "conflict" between Jesus and his disciples over their way of seeing things.[24] The following paragraphs show that the meaning of humility emerges in the filling in of the narrative gap.

As we noted in the preceding section, the disciples have probably not appreciated the significance of Jesus' words concerning their freedom from the temple tax. On the other hand, the reader infers from the dialogue (17.25-27) that Jesus regards the half-shekel tax as illegitimate because it is not sanctioned by Scripture. Since Israelites are sons of God, the analogy from imperial taxation that

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[23] On the discussion of a "non-virginal" reader in our literary reading, see ch. 2.

[24] See chapter 5 on the discussion of narrative context of the community discourse in Matthew's Gospel.

kings do not tax their own sons implies the *inappropriateness* of an "annual tax" exacted in the name of God for the upkeep of God's temple.[25] Rather, the temple should be maintained by free-will offerings of the heart, not by any form of human institution. Despite his disapproval, Jesus complies with the traditional obligation. The miraculous payment, then, represents the divine endorsement of Jesus' decision to pay the half-shekel lest unnecessary offence be caused to others.[26] Jesus' compliance in paying the temple tax (17.27) reveals, for the reader, an act of humility. There is no question of arrogance; rather a gentle attitude towards others who are in the wrong. The humility reveals an inner disposition

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[25] The proper question is therefore not who are the "sons" in Jesus' analogy of the kings and taxation (the kings' household, or citizens; see D.E. Garland 1987: 193,206-8) but the appropriate way of maintaining God's temple (so H. Montefiore 1964:70-71). The inappropriateness of the temple tax is indicated by the *a fortiori* force of Jesus' words, "then the sons are free" (17.26c): if kings of the earth do not tax their own sons, how much more is true of God. In view of Jesus' interpretation of the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount (5.21-48) and elsewhere (12.1-13; 19.3-9), the reader perceives that Jesus probably understands that the half-shekel cultic tax is not demanded by the law of Moses (Ex 30.11-16; cf. Neh 10.32f). Indeed, the Qumran covenanters rejected the yearly temple tax and paid the half-shekel only once in their lifetime (4Q159, fragment 1, 2.6-7). H. Montefiore (1964:70-71), W. Horbury (1984:282-85), R.A. Horsley (1987:281-82), Davies and Allison (1991:745) also understand the temple-tax incident as implying Jesus rejecting the imposition of the annual temple tax as illegitimate. *Pace* Garland (1987:208-9; 1993:187), Jesus' words, however, do not suggest an attack on the temple cultus itself.

[26] *Contra* E. Schweizer 1975:357, F.W. Beare 1981:372 (Davies and Allison 1991:747 remain uncommitted), the fulfilment of the "fish coin" prophecy as predicted (Mt 17.25) is assumed to have realized; so R.A. Edwards 1985: 64-65; M. Davies 1993:126.

which does not condemn when people are unaware of or ignorant of the matter which does not accord with God's will. This humility is further elaborated in Jesus' later instruction not to despise one's fellow disciple who has gone astray (18.10-14).

Jesus' humility in the temple-tax episode is also an act of self-denial. In accommodating a pious practice (paying the half-shekel), even when it is not demanded by the Scripture, Jesus voluntarily suppresses self-interest and right in order to avoid unnecessary offence to others, in this case the half-shekel collectors, who are ignorant of the will of God. Thus, the temple-tax incident is intimately related to Jesus' second prediction of his passion (17.22f). Jesus' death is the ultimate expression of his self-denial, a giving of his life for the "ransom for many" (20.28; cf. 16.21). But even before "the hour" (26.45), Jesus shows his humility in his self-denial in complying with a human institution (the half-shekel tax). The two incidents thus form the immediate interpretative context for the reader to understand humility as a gentle disposition and self-denial.

2. *Humility and the Portrayal of the Disciples*

The negative and positive portrayal of the disciples in the Gospel both contribute further to the meaning of humility in 18.1-4. Positively, the disciples are portrayed as obedient and faithful followers of Jesus. The first disciples are represented as responding obediently and instantly to Jesus' call (4.18-22), and so is Matthew the

toll-collector (9.9). The disciples accompany Jesus throughout his ministry[27] (until they forsake him at his arrest), obeying him[28] and following his life style.[29] Their following is contrasted with the unbelief and hostility of the Jewish leaders.[30] Yet their faith is unstable, evaporating in the face of crisis, thereby earning them the rebuke from Jesus, "men of little faith."[31] The disciples are also portrayed as lacking perception requiring explanation from Jesus for his parabolic teaching.[32]

But the most prominent failure of the disciples is portrayed in their preoccupation with status and power; they are thinking the things of men as opposed to Jesus who thinks with God (16.23). They think that their status is

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[27] Cf., e.g., Mt 5.1; 8.18,23; 9.19,32,36f; 12.15,46-50; 13.10,36; 14.13,15; 16.4c,5; 17.22-18.1.

[28] Cf. Mt 21.1-7; 26.17-19.

[29] On association with toll-collectors and "sinners," non-regular fasting, and nonconformity to hand washing before meal, see Mt 9.10-11,14; 15.1-2; cf. 11.18-19.

[30] Cf. Mt 12.1-16.12; this narrative section consists of three narrative cycles of hostility/unbelief, withdrawal, following by disciples and crowds, and Jesus' acts of miraculous power. See D.J. Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader" (1993).

[31] Ὀλιγόπιστοι in Mt 6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; cf. 17.20. While not persuaded by D.J. Verspeut's thesis (1992) that the purpose of the narrative in 13.53-16.20 is to educate the reader in the great power of Jesus, we do concur with his discernment that in this part of Matthew's narrative the disciples are not portrayed as progressing in their discipleship - they remain dull to Jesus' great power and display "little faith" in the face of its continuous manifestation.

[32] Mt 13.36 (cf. 13.18); 15.10-20; 16.5-12.

judged by God in terms of their "service" to him or Jesus and rewarded accordingly (19.27; cf. 19.28-20.16). These conflicting view points, as we have seen in chapter 5, are portrayed in the three narrative cycles of passion/ resurrection prediction, response/dialogue, instruction in 16.13-20.28. This narrative section indicates that in their minds discipleship of Jesus the messiah would entail glory and power.[33] Because of their self-concern for status, the disciples are blind to Jesus' humility exemplified in his self-denial. And in understanding that Jesus' words imply that they are sons of God exempted from the temple due, their concern is only with who among them is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

For the reader, both the merit and failure of the disciples portrayed in the gospel narrative (Mt 12-20) provide important clues to the understanding of humility. And together with the portrayal of Jesus in the temple-tax episode, they indicate that humility required of the disciples is a spiritual quality. It is a person's inner being which reveals its essence in his/her interaction with other people and an attitude to God which orients one's living. Humility entails (1) a gentleness of heart which does not condemn the wrongs of others; (2) a self-denial, a willingness to forego one's right or interest in order to

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[33] It is surprising that in his "Characterization of the disciples as a Feature in Matthew's Narrative" (1992), Richard Edwards has left out the entire section of 17.22-20.28 (containing the 2nd. and 3rd. passion/resurrection prediction cycles), even though they contain incidents which are important for perceiving the characterization of the disciples.

avoid being a stumbling stone to others in the matter of faith in Jesus; (3) obeying and trusting in God in recognition of one's dependence on God (cf. 5.3-12); (4) thinking with God, which means (5) living a life not preoccupied with the status and power of the world.

Thus in having the advantage of an overview of the narrative context of the discourse, the reader is able to relate humility in 18.1-4 to Jesus' attitude to the temple tax, his prediction of his passion, and the characterization of disciples in the Gospel as a whole. The reader understands Jesus' words more fully than the disciples in the story.

3. *A Kingdom Without Ranking*

Moreover, since it is only the *humble* disciples who can enter the kingdom of heaven (18.3), the saying that it is those who are humble like this child are the greatest (v 4), then, does not seem to express the notion of gradation of rank in the future kingdom. Rather, in the light of 18.3, v 4 conveys the thought that all who are admitted into the kingdom are of equal worth before God[34] - "greatest in the kingdom of heaven" in Jesus' reply (v 4) carries a rhetorical sense echoing the disciples' question, "who is *greatest* in the kingdom of heaven?" The thought is similar to 5.19f. The saying in 5.19 does not teach a lesser place in the kingdom for those who teach and obey inappropriately but is metaphorical, "a way of speaking

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[34] The same thought is found again in 18.10; see the discussion in ch. 8 of the literary reading of 18.10-20.

what is pleasing or displeasing to God."[35] In the same vein, 18.3-4 express the divine value judgment. A disciple's humility is what is most valued in God's eye; greatness before God is humility.[36]

4. *From the Narrative World to the Real World: Message to the Reader*

In reading Jesus' words in the discourse, the reader "hears" Jesus speaking to his disciples. However, the reader recognizes that in reality it is he/she who is being addressed. It is true that only beginning from 18.5 (especially in 18.10-20) do Jesus' words unambiguously display a post-Easter Christian perspective; they address a Christian community which is beyond the experiences of the (pre-Easter) disciples as it is narrated in the gospel narrative. But since the reader is not a "virginal" reader, knowing the later part of the discourse induces the reader

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[35] Klyne Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law" (1992), 373; see also, "Matthew and the Law" (1988), 548. Concerning the "least in the kingdom of heaven" in Mt 5.19, R.T. France expresses a similar view (1985:116): "*Least* is used chiefly for its rhetorical effect echoing the *least* commandment, ..., the thought is of quality of discipleship, not of ultimate rewards."

[36] Mt 11.11 does not contradict what we have just said. It is most improbable that 11.11 envisages John the Baptist being excluded from the future kingdom, nor is it contrasting the present state with that of the future kingdom. For the reader, the comparison is in the *present* state, and the sense is: those who participate and share the work of Jesus, the disciples as it is portrayed in the narrative (cf. 9.36-10.5a) and those in the post-Easter Christian community are greater than John who has not the privilege of participating in the work of Jesus. In this comparison, the "greatness" is therefore not of personal worth, and not about status in the future kingdom, but of different roles people partake in the "history" of salvation. See the survey of interpretation of Mt 11.11 in Davies/Allison (1991), 251-52 and notes thereupon.

to orient himself/herself to hear Jesus as addressing him/her from the very beginning.

Since the community discourse forms an integral part of the gospel story, when the discourse speaks to the reader, the portrayal of the disciples in the narrative leading to it is also referential (if only implicitly) to post-Easter discipleship. The characterization of the disciples becomes an index to the real world of the reader, providing the reader with insight to the reality of the post-Easter Christian community. Thus while the disciples in the story are weak in their faith (in trusting the heavenly Father), self-seeking, the later Christian community also exhibits a similar lack of humility: a lacking in a disposition of self-denial, and a striving for worldly status and power. For the reader, 18.1-4 speaks of a similar lack of humility in the disciples in the post-Easter Christian community.

The narrative world is thus referential to the world of the reader in a particular way. It is not that *characters* and *individual episodes* in the gospel story are "transparent" for the present of the post-Easter community so much as certain *aspects* of the disciples in the story world are referential to situations of the Christian community in the post-Easter era. They provide insights into the "real" world in which the reader lives.[37]

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[37] The "world" created in Matthew's narrative is what Scholes and Kellogg call "illustrative": it reminds the reader of some aspects of the reality (*The Nature of Narrative* [1966], 82-84). See also W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), 53, and R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the*

Furthermore, the reader perceives that Jesus' reply in 18.2-4 indicates another aspect of the Christian community. There will be some in the community who will not be admitted into the future kingdom, that is, those who lack the required humility. In other words, the reader is warned that being a member of the community of Jesus does not mean an automatic admission into the future kingdom. The reader is, however, not surprised by this rejection of some members of the community. For the parables of the sower, the tares, and the drag-net, together with their interpretations, have already spoken to the reader of a *mixed* community of true and false disciples that awaits separation at the end of the present age. In the light of the parable discourse, which instructs the reader of the community of Jesus as a *corpus mixtum*, the dialogue in 18.1-4 instructs the reader further on the mixed nature of the community. The Christian community is a mixed body; but apart from the work of the Devil in "planting" his sons into the community of Jesus (13.38f), the mixed state also has its human origin. 18.1-4 address this mixed state as arising also from the human heart.

IV. Concluding Remarks

(1) We have contrasted the reading of the reader with the understanding of the disciples in the narrative world. The contrast is partially analogous to the comparison between the comprehension resulting from a multiple-reading

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Fourth Gospel (1983), 4-5, 234-35.

and a first-time reading. The comparison is only partial, because the understanding of the disciples in the narrative differs from the reader-oriented reading in the following ways: (i) It is the understanding of the characters inhabiting the narrative world, as opposed to a reader who reads from *outside* the story world. (ii) The experience of the characters concerned (such as the disciples) pertains to an interpersonal conversational situation in contrast to that of a reading process. (iii) The characters are not "competent" readers who, as in the case of a reader generally assumed in a reader-oriented reading, are capable of keeping track of and relating (to the best of his/her literary ability) all the preceding materials in the narrative. The limited understanding of the disciples becomes more evident when it is compared with the comprehension of a reader who is fully conversant with the plot of the gospel story.

(2) For the reader, the meaning of the text (18.1-4) arises from the interaction between the text and the reader in the bridging of the narrative gap which results from the episodic character of Matthew's Gospel. The juxtaposition of the temple-tax episode and the discourse, all situated in the broader context of the "conflict" between Jesus and his disciples, have induced the reader to perceive humility in the light of the portrayal of Jesus (in the incident of half-shekel and the passion prediction) and the disciples in the rest of the Gospel. The words and action of Jesus and of the disciples point to the humility required of

Jesus' followers.

(3) This has significant implication for understanding the referential function of the gospel narrative. The referentiality of the narrative world (apart from the discourses) regarding the behaviour of the disciples consists in understanding the characterization as an index to discipleship in the post-Easter Christian community. As perceived by the reader, the relationship of the world of the gospel story to the real world of the reader is "illustrative." The images of the disciples remind the reader of certain aspects of the "reality" of the post-Easter Christian community.

A REDACTION-CRITICAL READING

Mt 18.1-4 will now be read from a redaction-critical perspective. From 14.1 onwards Matthew generally follows Mark (6.14 onward) in respect of the order of events.[38] A comparison with Mark 9.30-32,33-50 reveals that Mt 17.22f,24 and 18.1-9 conform to this "redactional strategy." However, the evangelist has radically modified

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[38] The major "dislocations" in the order of events in Matthew from Mark are found in (1) Mt 4.23-8.17, (2) 8.18-13.58 and (3) 21.12-22. Regarding the narration of the death of the Baptist in Mt 14, it must be noted that Matthew differs also from Mark in portraying the event. The episode in both Gospels is a "flash-back." Mark narrates the Baptist's death within the narrative that depicts Jesus' power and in particular as a "flash-back" filling the time interval between the commissioning and return of the twelve disciples (4.35-6.6; 6.7-30). In Matthew's Gospel, the episode forms part of the narrative which depicts Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders (12.1-16.12; cf. the withdrawal motif in 12.15; 14.13; 16.4). The two synoptic gospels thus represent the same event with a different narrative function in the plot of the story.

the material in Mark through his own composition, omission (cf. Mk 9.35), and his addition of sayings tradition (Q). We shall here look at Mark 9.33-37, which portrays a similar picture of Jesus teaching his disciples on true greatness as in Mt 18.1-4.

I. Synoptic Comparisons

A comparison between Mk 9.33-37 and Mt 18.1-4 quickly establishes the following similarities. In the light of Mt 17.24-27, the setting of the Matthean discourse is located in a house in Capernaum as in Mark (9.33). Both evangelists narrate Jesus' symbolic action of putting up a child in the midst of the disciples, and both present a scenario of Jesus teaching his disciples on true greatness.

The story in Matthew, however, differs from Mark in some important ways. (1) Mark 9.33-37 presents a scenario of the disciples disputing on greatness among themselves after Jesus' (second) prediction of passion and resurrection. When Jesus begins to teach the disciples it is the "twelve" who are specifically in view (9.35). Matthew appears to present a different sequence of events. There is no portraying or indication of the disciples having had a dispute over precedence among themselves; they are simply presented as coming to Jesus to ask who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And their enquiry is placed alongside the episode of the temple-tax (17.24-27), thus linking temporally the question as apparently arising from their hearing the conversation between Jesus and

Peter. In Matthew, Jesus is simply addressing his disciples - an undifferentiated group, although the twelve are probably included; cf. 18.21).[39]

(2) The other significant discrepancies lie in Matthew's omissions and additions. The entrance-saying in Mt 18.3 is not found in Mk 9.33-37, but the saying bears a small degree of similarity to a logion in Mark from a different context (Mk 10.13-16): "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mk 10.15). Conversely, the servant-saying in Mk 9.35 ("if any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all") has no counterpart in Mt 18.1-4, though its substance is found in 23.11.

Regarding Mt 18.3, the evangelist apparently makes use of a Jesus logion in Mark 10.15, or an independent version of it.[40] In Mk 10.15, to receive the kingdom of God like a child means to submit oneself to God's will, just as a child submits to the authority of his parents.[41] And it is

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[39] On the twelve disciples in Matthew, cf. 10.1-4; 11.1; 20.20-28. On "disciples" as an undifferentiated group in Matthew, see ch. 3, pp. 47-48 and the notes there.

[40] Cf. also John 3.3,5.

[41] The submission to parents' authority is apparently seen in the children's being brought to Jesus. *Contra* Schilling (1966-67), Robbins (1983:59), Tannehill (1983:104-5) who take παιδίον in the accusative parallel to τὴν βασιλείαν ("as he receives a child"), and understand the likening of kingdom to a child as describing the nature of the present kingdom of God - like a child, weak and insignificant. For criticism of this interpretation, see R. Gundry, *Mark* (1993), 550-51. To make better sense of Mk 10.13-16, we take παιδίον as the subject and understand "to receive the kingdom of God" as submission to God's rule (with Gundry [1993:545]). See G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus* (Etr. 1902), 97-98,124-25. In view of the rabbinic parallel

those who submit themselves to God's rule in the *present* time who will be able to enter the *future* kingdom.[42] It has now become clear that Mt 18.3 and Mk 10.15, though expressed somewhat differently, have essentially the same meaning.[43] And this may support the view that Matthew has Mk 10.15 as his written source; the evangelist has reworked the logion, changing "receiving the kingdom of God like a child" into "turn and become like children" in order to bring out more explicitly that true greatness is found in

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קבל מלכות, Dalman understands "to receive the kingdom of heaven" to mean submission to divine rule, and takes this meaning as a possible understanding for Mk 10.15. See also Windisch 1928:164 n.3 on the similar position. We therefore disagree with Ambrozic (1972:154-55,158) who thinks the phrase as referring to accepting God's free gift; similarly, Cranfield 1959:323-24, Nineham 1963:267-68, Lane 1974:360-61; Hooker 1991:239.

[42] In view of our interpretation, Mk 10.15 thus contains within itself both the present, dynamic aspect of the kingdom (submission to God's rule) and its future, local aspect (to enter). And v 15 explains the preceding verse why the kingdom belongs to those (τῶν τοιούτων) who are like children in recognizing their insignificance. This interpretation of Mk 10.15 enables one to make sense of the Markan pericope of Jesus' blessing children as a unified story, irrespective of the sources behind it. On the composition of Mk 10.13-16 (and other pericopes on Jesus and the children) as an expanded chreia, thus exhibiting the unity of the narrative, see Robbins 1983.

[43] Naturally, any textual interpretation is done within the interpretative framework of an interpreter who is not part of the text he/she is studying (see J.R. Searle, "Literary Theory and Its Discontents," [1994], 640-42), and it is particularly a "pitfall" for gospel interpreters to read Matthew in the light of Mark. However, it must be emphasized here that our reading of Mk 10.15 (in 10.13-16) is consciously obtained without consideration of Mt 18.3, and hence Schilling's charge of harmonization of the two passages by reading Mark in the light of Matthew (1965-66:56) cannot be justified in our case.

the quality of humility.[44]

On the other hand, there is the possibility that Mt 18.3 is an independent version of a Jesus logion similar to Mk 10.15.[45] In fact, the independence of Mt 18.3 appears more probable on the evidence of a Matthean redactional pattern: apart from the present case of Mt 18.3, we observe that the evangelist's insertions of Jesus' saying(s) into *Markan peri-copes* are either from the sayings-source Q (or a recension Q^{mt}) or the material peculiar to his Gospel (M).[46] On the basis of this observation, it is plausible to infer that Mt 18.3 is derived from some (orally) circulating isolated Jesus' logion which represents a version of the saying represented in Mk 10.15. This is further supported by the entrance sayings in John 3:3,5 which testify to both evangelists' drawing upon some common tradition of Jesus. If this is so, then, Matthew has adopted the logion as part of his reworking of the Markan tradition to create the theme of humility as recognition of

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[44] See, for instance, Manson 1949:207; Gundry 1982: 360.

[45] This is the view of, e.g., Jeremias (1963:190 n.76), B. Lindars (1981), Davies and Allison (1991:756-57).

[46] Inserted Saying(s)/Source | Pericope

Mt 3.14-15	M	Mt 3.13-17	Mk 1.9-11
9.13ab	M	9.10-13	2.14-17
12.5-7	M	12.1-8	2.23-28
12.11-12	M	12.9-14	3.1-6
21.43	M	21.33-46	12.1-12
17.20	Q (= Lk 17.6)	17.14-20	9.14-29
19.28	Q (= Lk 22.28-30)	19.13-30	10.17-31

See also the Q-saying (Mt 8.11-12 = Lk 13.28-29) placed in the centurion-pericope (Mt 8.1-13) which has the Lukan parallel (Lk 7.1-10).

dependency upon God and submission to his will.

It is perhaps difficult to be absolutely certain about the source and redaction of Mt 18.3. But for our purpose it is sufficiently clear that, regardless of source, the evangelist included this saying of Jesus to be part of Jesus' reply for the purpose of emphasizing that it is humility which constitutes true greatness.

(3) Matthew composes the saying in 18.4 (apparently in analogy to the Q saying in Mt 23.12 = Lk 18.14b) as Jesus' direct answer to his disciples' question.[47] But the evangelist probably understands the substance of his composition as already implied in the servant-saying in Mk 9.35.

II. Matthew's Transformation of His Sources

With these alterations by the evangelist, the passage in the Gospel of Matthew thus conveys a different flow of thought in Jesus' words and action from the corresponding pericope in Mark. The flow of thought in each narrative may be encapsulated in the following tabulation:

Mark	**Matthew**
The disciples' dispute	The temple-tax incident
Servant-saying	Child symbolism
Child symbolism	Entrance-saying
Receiving one such child	Humbling like this child

In Mark, greatness among the disciples is expounded in the context of their dispute in terms of *humble service* expressed in the servant-saying (9.35). Jesus' symbolic

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[47] Matthean diction is found in ὅστις, οὖν (as a simple connective), οὗτός ἐστιν and βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

action with the child (9.36) is an object lesson exemplifying the humble service: truly humble service includes receiving even the children, the most insignificant in the society. This is further explained in the next verse: a disciple who leads a life of humble service is greatest because in their acts of serving they are indeed receiving Jesus and God himself.[48]

In Mt 18.1-4, without the Markan servant-saying, the child symbolism (v 2) is *not* an object lesson illustrating *humble service*, but rather functions as the *symbol* of the quality of humility. As expressed in 18.3f, humility is the one and the same condition for entering the future kingdom *and* the divine criterion of greatness. By introducing the entrance saying at 18.3 and composing 18.4 as the direct reply to the disciples' question, Matthew has effectively created a different flow of thought in a non-controversial scene. The point is still on the right understanding of greatness, but the emphasis has shifted from true greatness as a matter of humble service to greatness as the *quality of humility*.

Thus in Mt 18.5, the receiving of "one such child"

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[48] Cranfield 1959:308; Ambrozic 1972:156-58. Gundry (1993:509) similarly sees Mk 9.37 as interpreting the object lesson of the child in v 36, but unfortunately does not spell out clearly its meaning as it is related to Mk 9.36. Morna Hooker sees 9.36f, though awkward in their connection with vv. 33-35, as still fitting to the overall theme of humility, but understands the connection to be primarily that of a contrast: "instead of worrying about their positions, they [disciples] should be concerned for the weakest and most humble members of the community - typified by these little children ..." (1991:228). She also understands "one such children" in Mk 9.37 as referring to humble disciples.

becomes no longer a model of humble service as in Mark, but with v 6 expresses a concrete realization of humility in the experience of community life of disciples. Matthew's redaction thus indicates that the Markan unit of 9.33-37 cannot be taken as the basis for regarding Mt 18.1-5 as a semantic unit, simply because of the recurrent key word παιδίον in these verses.

III. Concluding Remarks

(1) Matthew probably composed the narrative (18.1-4) himself[49] on the basis of the Markan pericope of the disciples' dispute on greatness (9.33-37). Through the disciples asking the question of greatness within the setting of the temple tax incident, Matthew has essentially achieved the same effect of Mk 9.33-34 in representing the disciples' preoccupation with status and prestige. But Matthew's emphasis is focused on humility as one's spiritual constitution, an inner attitude towards God and humans as well. The above redaction-critical analysis thus lends some external evidence to the literary reading that humility perceived through the narrative characterization of Jesus and disciples is not far from Matthew's intention.

(2) In replacing the "twelve" (disciples) in Mark (9.35) with the "disciples" (18.1) and presenting Jesus as addressing the whole group, Matthew has indicated that the

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[49] Apart from βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, the following vocabularies are characteristic of Matthew: προσέρχομαι + οἱ μαθηταί (αὐτοῦ), ὥρα with ἐκείνη in narrative, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅστις, οὖν, οὗτός εστιν. See the lists of Matthean diction in Davies/Allison 1989:74-79.

discourse is for Jesus' followers in general, and not just for the "leaders" of the Christian community.

(3) The above redaction-critical analysis also confirms our preceding literary reading that 18.1-4 is the appropriate "unit" of thought. In the Markan picture, 9.37 (on receiving children) elaborates and completes Jesus' teaching on humble service: to receive children reveals genuine humble service, the act of obedience which indicates that one is obeying Jesus ("in my name") and hence "receiving him" and God himself (Mk 9.37). On the other hand, with verse 18.4 Matthew has Jesus answer directly the disciple's question, so that despite its resemblance to Mk 9.37a the saying in Mt 18.5 does not play the role of the parallel Markan saying.

A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING

As we emphasize in our discussion in chapter 4, our social-scientific reading is an attempt to relate the text to the social context of its author and his first readers or listeners. It is assumed that Matthew's Gospel and the community discourse in particular was written in the context of (1) the social experience of the community as a beleaguered group in the Jewish society, (2) the ethos of the Christian community in which its members perceived their lives as a living out of the will of God and their community as the embodiment of the rule of God, if only partially, on earth. (3) At the same time the evangelist was also aware of the emergence of an undercurrent of

worldly thinking within the community. This setting of mind on things on earth was threatening to undermine the social ethos of the community, putting the community in danger of becoming indistinguishable from the unbelieving Jewish community with regard to its way of life.

In the social-scientific reading, the opening words of Jesus (18.1-4) will be read from the perspective of the evangelist, understanding them to say what it means for the community of Jesus' disciples to live out a life of doing God's will (ethos). The same passage will then be read from the vantage point of the first (historical) recipients of Matthew, with their feeling of being ostracized as "outsiders" in the Jewish community.

I. Community Ethos and Boundaries

As in Mt 20.20-28 which presents the disciples as concerned with status and power,[50] the disciples' question in 18.1 indicate a similar frame of mind, a concern with their positions in the future kingdom of heaven. It is a way of thinking which Matthew thought was threatening to undermine the community ethos. Through Jesus' words in 18.2-4, Matthew indicates that God demands a way of life among Jesus' disciples which is characterized by humility, for every humble disciple is of equal worth in the eyes of God, and it is on the basis of his humility being actualized in a community life that a disciple can enter the kingdom of heaven.

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[50] See also Mt 23.8-12; cf. 16.21-23 as well.

In sociological terms, the evangelist is clarifying or "defining" the boundaries of the community through the figure of a child, who is to constitute the symbolic expression of humility. To urge that humility be a "component" of the group boundaries is insisting that humility should constitute a significant aspect of the experience of the community life, which marks the community from the world outside in regard to the way of life. In general terms, the social ethos of the Matthean community is the living expression of the boundaries of the group, for the ethos of the Matthean community consists in the collective self-perception and the unarticulated, shared thinking of living a life which conforms to the will of God. As a self-perception and way of life, the boundaries are symbolic, imperceptible to "outsiders" who "see" the community from without. The boundaries of a community therefore appear differently to the beholders and the beholden. Seen from within only members of the Matthean community perceive the "private face" of their community. And humility is the general outlook of this private face. What the outsiders see is the "public face" of the community, those aspects of the community which are perceptible to the world, namely, its professed belief and faith in Jesus of Nazareth.[51]

Without further definition or common agreement, the meaning of humility appears to be equivocal. For humility

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[51] I have taken these two terms from the British anthropologist, Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), 73-74.

belongs to the category of words which, according to Anthony Cohen, is by its very nature symbolic.[52] In Cohen's words, "Symbols do not so much express meaning as give us the capacity to make meaning;"[53] they are "carriers of meaning."[54] But in 18.2-3, humility does receive a certain degree of specification through its association with children, making the figure of children a point of reference for the reality of humility.

From a sociological perspective, the figure of children is intended by the evangelist to function as a socially shared symbol. An enduring social symbol not only makes accessible the non-perceivable reality (such as idea, value, belief or assumed spiritual reality in a religion) in perceivable object or symbolic form, but it also has experiential and emotional values. Experientially, the perceivable object or symbolic form provides the *means* to experience psychologically the reality symbolized. As opposed to a "dead" symbol, a live social symbol is also emotionally charged; it is capable of evoking sentiment toward the reality it embodies.[55] In understanding 18.2-4

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[52] Cohen (1985:14) gives other words that are symbolic in nature, such as freedom, democracy, life, death, purity, and even father; on discussion of symbols, see pp. 14-19.

[53] Cohen 1985:15.

[54] Cohen, "Culture As Identity: An Anthropologist's View" (1993), 196.

[55] On conceptualization of social symbols as social representation, see Maykel Verkuyten, "Symbols and Social Representations" (1995). In experiments conducted in 1991 by Verkuyten in association with S. Reicher and M. Herrera for rating the social impact of various images of the Gulf War, the one that has the greatest impact is pictures of

to express a community life which is pleasing to God, humility is embodied in the figure of children. Children, as members of Jewish and Hellenistic households under parental care and discipline, evoke the images of dependence, obedience and submission to parents.[56] In objectifying humility in the figure of children (18.3f), the notion of humility is thus linked with these images of children. The symbol of children as the embodiment of humility thus reminds members of the community that God is their heavenly Father and they owe him absolute obedience and submission as his children. In this sense, the familiar image of children not only symbolizes the essence of humility but also presents itself as a means to experience psychologically the reality of humility towards God.

Yet Matthew does more than simply suggest a symbol for representing humility before God. The fact that in 18.5f the disciples are designated as "little ones" indicates that the evangelist insists that members of his community should strive to identify with children (18.3f). Thus each member is to become a *living* symbol of humility. Through the very presence of other members, the community itself becomes the means for its members to experience

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birds in oil. The oily birds are somehow a powerful symbol which makes it possible for people to participate psychologically in the experience of innocent suffering, devastation and defencelessness of the War.

[56] For a concise delineation of Greco-Roman and Jewish households in Hellenistic period, see D.C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (1983), 28-47. On the social significance of households in Hellenistic Roman culture and in Judaism, see J.H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* (1991), 170-200.

psychologically and emotionally their sonship with God in their dependence upon and submission to the heavenly Father.

The child symbolism has also another dimension. Children are socially insignificant; the figure of children is therefore symbolic of insignificance. Thus apart from signifying humility before God, children also symbolize a life of humility in interaction with other members of the community. The two aspects of symbolism are in fact interrelated. For it is with the attitude of humility before God that members of the Matthean community are able to humble themselves toward one another, since they each recognize their own dependency upon God. This humility among the members of the community finds expression in the "receiving" of others, seeking those who have gone astray, and in genuine forgiveness, as delineated in the rest of the discourse.

However, the meaning of humility is still subjective, to be realized according to individual interpretation of the notion of trust and submission to God, as well as the *way* of humility among other members. The image of children only provides a general qualitative guidance to humility and not a prescriptive one. Nonetheless, humility does provide the community with a common symbol, a common "language" for its members to perceive of themselves as sons of God and experience community life. The boundary drawn by "humility" is therefore symbolic: not only is such a boundary imperceptible to outsiders, but the boundary may

be perceived differently even by members of the community.

Furthermore, since humility is primarily an inner state of a person, its absence can easily escape other members' attention. Consequently, the maintenance of this boundary - and the required internal attitude of genuine forgiveness (18.35) - is essentially provided for by the conscience of individual members. External support is provided by Jesus stern warning at 18.3 ("Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven").

II. Reading/Listening Experience: Seeing Things In a New Light

We note in chapter 4 that any discussion of the reading or aural experience in members of the Matthean community is essentially an interpretation of the way the first recipients would have appropriated the text. Such experience is a social one in the sense that the thoughts evoked among the Matthean Christians in reading/listening to the discourse would be typical, for they shared the same religious convictions and social ethos of the group.

Thus in the context of the community ethos, Jesus' words in 18.1-4 would lead members of the Matthean community to perceive living a life of doing the will of God in a new light: it is first of all a matter of inner attitude towards God, a humble recognition of one's dependence on God for his sustenance of life both material and spiritual. In recalling Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, the Matthean Christians saw Jesus' present words

encapsulated in the words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5.3).

The text further opens the door for the members of the community to perceive how in their way of life they are different from the Jewish community outside. If the Matthean Christians saw that in rejecting Jesus, the unbelieving Jewish community under a blind leadership was no longer living a community life in conformity to divine will, in what way was their *way of life* different from that of the unbelieving Jews? The passage points to a difference which exists in the hearts, their humility before God and inner attitudes towards their fellow community members.

But the first audience also came to be conscious of a dimension of salvation of which they had not been aware: salvation involving participation of a person in inner humility towards God and fellow disciples, the absence of which would deny admission to the kingdom of heaven of some of their fellow disciples. This doubtless raised questions in the minds of the members of the Matthean community as to the reality of the salvation which they believed to have obtained through Jesus' redemptive death, and how they themselves differed from the unbelieving Jews in regard to the reality of salvation.

III. Concluding Remarks

We are now in a position to make a few initial comments on the nature of the three different readings of Mt 18.1-4. (1) The social-scientific reading is essentially

a form of reader-oriented reading, and it is a referential one. The reader is a modern reader who "situates" himself/herself within the social ethos of the Matthean community (the community as the embodiment of the rule of God on earth), but understands with modern sociological categories and thinking. He/She reads with the evangelist, understanding that Matthew intends Jesus' words in 18.1-4 to mean what a life of doing God's will would entail for Jesus' disciples. This is translated into a modern sociological category as defining the symbolic boundary of the Christian community through the image of children. This symbolic boundary is therefore imperceptible to outsiders, while its meaning and realization are capable of being perceived differently by different members of the Matthean community.

(2) The text is also read by assuming the role of the first recipients. The reading from the readers or hearers' perspective is even more oriented to its (social) situation, more conscious of how the historical readers or hearers are different from the unbelieving Jewish community. Jesus' words impart to them a fresh way of looking at the difference between them and those outside their group: it is true humility that makes the difference, the sign of God's rule in the community.

(3) In contrast, the reader in our literary reading is not specified with respect to his/her socio-historical context, thought it is evident that the reading is inevitably influenced by his/her social location. However,

the "literary reader" is defined in some other aspects, namely, that he/she is the disciple of Jesus temporally situated near the end of the twentieth century, familiar with first-century Judaism, and that he/she is not a first-time reader of Matthew's Gospel and is conversant with the plot of the Gospel.

(4) In terms of readership, unlike the traditional redaction criticism in which the reader is the intended reader (audience) of the evangelist's community, our redaction-critical reading presupposes a modern reader who reads Matthew's Gospel by consciously comparing the Jesus sayings in the discourse with parallel Markan material. This "synoptic knowledge" is one which is lacking in the reader involved in a "close," literary reading.

The redaction-critical reading adopted here is, however, not a "transparency" reading, whereby the original intended readers related the characters or various episodes in the Gospel to their social world. As we have seen, the version of redaction-critical reading undertaken here focuses on Matthew's transformation of his source materials, and hence on his intention for the meaning of the text. Our redaction-critical reading of 18.1-4 indicates that the evangelist modifies the Jesus tradition in order to emphasize humility as the spiritual quality required of discipleship of Jesus.

Chapter 7

INTERPRETATION OF MT 18.5-9

A LITERARY READING

As in the eschatological discourse, Jesus' reply to the disciples in the discourse on community life goes beyond their question on greatness in the kingdom of heaven (18.1).[1] We have seen in the preceding chapter that 18.1-4 represents Jesus' immediate answer to the question on greatness by defining it in terms of humility as an inner disposition towards God. What follows in 18.5-9 is an explication of what humility will entail in the Christian community life.

I. The Flow of Thought

Following on from 18.1-4, vv 5-9 convey a sense of personal interaction among Jesus' disciples, denoted by the verbs δέχεσθαι and σκανδαλίζειν. Since 18.5f describe a contrast of personal interaction in terms of "receiving" and "stumbling," each verse needs to be read in the light of the other. Accordingly, parallel with "little ones *who believe in Jesus*" in v 6, the phrase "one such child" in

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[1] So in replying to the disciples' questions on the destruction of the temple and of his coming in glory, Jesus goes further to stress the need of his disciples for preparedness in their waiting for Jesus' return (24.42-25.30) as well as the final separation of the Christians from non-believers and the nominal disciples on the ground of a person's response to Jesus' disciples in distress (25.31-46).

v 5 is a reference to a disciple of Jesus[2] and not to children as such (as represented in 18.2).[3] The phrase ἕν παιδίον τοιοῦτο continues the image of children in 18.2-4, but παιδίον is now used metaphorically as a synonym for ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων in 18.6.

On this reading, the prepositional phrase ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου in v 5 ("to receive one such child in the name of Jesus") does not mean "to perceive Christ in that child and act accordingly,"[4] neither does it mean "because of me" nor "because I have commanded it."[5] Such understandings presuppose "one such child" literally as a child.[6] Rather, in understanding "one such child" as designating disciples, the prepositional phrase expresses receiving someone on the ground (ἐπί) of his/her confession of faith in Jesus.[7] In other words, 18.5 conveys the sense that the person is

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[2] See, e.g., F.W. Beare 1981:376, R. Gundry 1982:361, D.A. Carson 1984:398, D.J. Harrington 1991:264(n.5), 265.

[3] So in taking v 5 with 18.1-4, Davies and Allison state that "18.1-5 concerns literal children" (1991:754; see also 759-60,777). In understanding "one such child" literally, Harrington (1991:264 n. 5) appears inconsistent as he takes vv 5-9 as a "unit.". See also W.C. Allen 1912:194,196, E. Schweizer 1975:363; D. Hill 1972:273, F.D. Bruner (1990:636).

[4] Davies and Allison 1991:760, apparently adopting the view of W.C. Allen 1912:194.

[5] D. Hill 1972:273.

[6] See n. 3 above.

[7] See D.A. Carson 1984:398, apparently taking the phrase to go with παιδίον: "they come in Jesus' name (v.5) - i.e. they belong to him [Jesus]." The same phrase occurs at Mt 24.5. There the phrase does not mean representing Jesus ("in Jesus' name"), but conveys the sense that false messiahs (cf. 24.23-24) are *assuming* the title "Christ," claiming, "I am the Christ."

received *as* a disciple.

A disciple's attitude and conduct towards others carry serious consequences: one will either receive Jesus himself or will suffer a dreadful eternal fate. While acts of stumbling are inevitable and the situation is stated with a woe of sympathetic sorrow (v 7ab), individual disciples are not free from their responsibilities for their actions and are liable to divine judgment, as implied in the (second) woe of proclamation of judgment (v 7c). In vv 8-9 divine judgment becomes explicit. Jesus has been speaking on not causing others to stumble and insisting that a person becomes a "stumbling block" through his/her conduct (18.7).[8] It is, then, most likely that 18.8f continues with the thought that the disciples are the occasion of others' falling, rather than a changing of subject matter from causing *others* to stumble to *one's own stumbling* created by one's own sin.[9] Continuity of thought therefore favours taking σκανδαλίζει σε in vv 8f in the causative sense instead of the usual sense of "cause you to sin" (cf. 5.29f), so that the sense of the verses is: if your hand or foot or eye *makes you a stumbling block* (to others), remove

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[8] Note that in Mt 13.41, τὰ σκάνδαλα, in parallel with "those who do evil things," clearly expresses the metaphorical sense of people who cause others to fall. In 16.23, Peter is told by Jesus that he is a "stumbling block" to him.

[9] This is the common exegetical view of New Testament scholarship on Mt 18.8f, taking σκανδαλίζειν to refer to one's own stumbling; see, e.g., A.H. M'Neile 1915:262, J.P. Meier 1979:130, F.W. Beare 1981:376, R. Gundry 1982:363, D.A. Carson 1984:399, D. Patte 1987:249, W.D. Davies/D.C. Allison 1991:765, D.A. Hagner 1995: 523-24.

it from your body![10] This reading is supported by the conditional form (εἰ + indicative): in following v 7 immediately, which is about those who cause others to fall, the use of this conditional construction continues the preceding theme of being a stumbling block.[11] Accordingly, the particle (δέ) in 18.8 is progressional, having the force of reinforcement: "*Indeed*, if your hand or foot makes you a stumbling-stone, ..."[12] The disciples are sternly warned against becoming the agents of stumbling.[13]

From the above discussion, the general flow of thought

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[10] See also W.G. Thompson 1970:116-18; Blass, Debrunner, Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (1961), § 108(3) [hereafter BDF]. Hagner (1995:523), and Davies and Allison (1991:766) admit the possibility of the causative sense of σκανδαλίζειν in Mt 18.8f.

[11] Despite the "non-factive" character of the conditional form (εἰ with indicative), when the assertion in protasis occurs in non-argumentative context, the action or the state of affairs in view has a contingent nature (so Mt 5.29f immediately following the demand of purity of thought in 5.27f; see also 8.31; 17.4), in contrast to projection of action or event for hypothetical consideration conveyed by the condition with subjunctive (ἐάν), as, e.g., in Mt 5.46f (cf. Lk 16.31). See Stanley Porter, *Verbal Aspects in the Greek of the New Testament* (1989), 294-316.

[12] See W. Bauer et al, *A Greek English Lexicon* (1979) [hereafter "BAGD"], s.v. δε, 2. Understandably, in taking 18.8-9 to refer to one's own sins, D.A. Carson (1984:399) takes the particle in its adversative sense ("but").

[13] From the consideration of the sequence of thought, it is most improbable that 18.8f speak of some form of excommunication. This "ecclesiastical" interpretation takes the view that the excising of members of the body is a metaphorical expression of throwing off from the Christian community its corrupting members; see D.O. Via, "The Church As the Body of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew" (1958); J.A. Overman, Matthew's Gospel and the Formative Judaism (1990), 102-3, and D.J. Harrington 1991: 264-65. Against this view, see also E. Schweizer 1975:365; Davies/Allison 1991:765. See further discussion below and the literary reading of 18.15-20 in the next chapter.

of 18.5-9 is clear, but its relation with vv 1-4 is, however, not evident. What are receiving and stumbling constitutive of, and in what sense do these actions reveal or relate to a disciple's humility mentioned in 18.1-4?

"To follow a story," as Paul Ricoeur expresses it, "is to understand the successive actions, thoughts, and feelings as having a particular directedness."[14] Verses 5-9 thus call for the construal of some connection of thought with the preceding verses on humility. As with 18.1-4 and 17.24-27, we have here a narrative gap ("textual blank") between vv 1-4 and 5-9.[15] As we shall show below, the disciples in the narrative did not quite catch the thrust of Jesus' words in vv 5-9. For the reader, the comprehension process will be seen as a "filling in" of the perceived narrative gap between vv 1-4 and 5-9.

II. The Understanding of the Disciples in the Narrative

It will be recalled from chapter 6 that the disciples' understanding is a construction (by a reader) of how the disciples as characters in the narrative world of Matthew's Gospel would have understood Jesus' words. As Jesus went beyond his reply to his disciples and spoke about receiving or causing others to stumble, the disciples began to sense that Jesus had ceased talking about the eschatological kingdom and was now speaking about life in the community of

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[14] Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function" (1978), 182.

[15] See ch. 2 on the literary reading strategy.

disciples. Unless the disciples recalled Jesus' words in his commissioning address, about hospitality shown to "one of these little ones because he is a disciple" (10.42), it is most probable that they simply understood the "little ones" (and also "one such child") as some *insignificant* disciples within the community.[16] And in envisaging a future community, it is plausible that the disciples understood δέχεσθαι and σκανδαλίζειν in a general sense of fellowship and conflicts within the community, so that "receiving" conveys a sense of mutual acceptance within the community,[17] treatment of kindness and respect[18] or warm

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[16] In classical and Hellenistic Greek, μικροί ("small"), as opposed to μέγας, is used in relation to size, quantity, time, age, and importance; see LSJ and BAGD s.v. Thus in 18.6 the substantive οἱ μικροί in itself may mean young people or people of no account, physical size being irrelevant here. See R. Gundry 1982: 361: "little people, 'average' Christians and especially youth," taking "one such child" and "little one" in 18.5f as synonymous; F.W. Beare "the humblest believers whatever their age" (1981:376); D. Senior: "weak and marginal in the community" (1987:403). Similarly, D.E. Garland (1993:189) understands the term as the reference to those disciples who are despised because of their social standing or of apparently little worth in the Christian community. S. Agourides (1984) advocates μικρος as referring to age and thus οἱ μικροί designate a group of young disciples within the Christian community in tension with its leadership. Except for Agourides's, these readings are compatible with the fact that the disciples in the narrative heard Jesus' words in the discourse in relative isolation without reference to its earlier occurrence in the gospel narrative.

[17] In both classical and Hellenistic Greek, δέχεσθαι is used in relation to thing (such as receiving some one's letter, teaching) or person (to show hospitality, acceptance or regard); see LSJ and BAGD s.v. Thus Gundry 1982:361: acceptance by the church leaders of the insignificant disciples; see also M'Neile 1915:261.

[18] Beare 1981:376.

welcome,[19] and "causing others to fall" as meaning to offend (cf. 15.12), or more seriously to lead others to sin or fall from faith in Jesus.[20]

Perhaps Jesus' speaking of a future community would not be much of a surprise to the disciples, for they believed that as the messiah of Israel, Jesus (whom they have confessed not long ago; cf. 16.16) would rule over the community of God's people. And on recalling Jesus' words in Caesarea Philippi they would have understood that Jesus was speaking about his future community (16.18). What is puzzling in the hearing of the disciples, however, is the words about receiving one's fellow disciple as if receiving Jesus himself. Given the context of Jesus' subject matter, the reception of some-one as Jesus' *representative*, such as on his missionary journey, is not in view (cf. 10.40-42). The thought of "receiving Jesus" in 18.5f implies the *absence* of Jesus in the messianic community, and hence the

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[19] Taking 18.1-5 as a unit and understanding "one such child" literally, Davies and Allison have no difficulty in conceiving "receiving" as welcoming of children (1991:759-60); similarly Patte 1987:248-50. Allowing for the possibility of "child" denoting humble disciple, D. Hill understands "receiving" as "welcome and care for" (1972:273). While taking "one such child" as metaphorical, W.G. Thompson (1970:101), D.A. Carson (1984:398) also take the general sense of "welcoming."

[20] Cf. Mt 5.29f. See, e.g., W.G. Thompson (1970:103), D. Hill (1972:273), F.W. Beare (1981:376), R. Gundry (1982:361), D. Patte (1987:249), D.J. Harrington (1991: 260), Davies and Allison (1991:761-62) [but on p. 777 the sense is weakened to "offending others"], D.E. Garland (1993:189); apparently E. Schweizer (1975:365) citing Rom 14.1ff; 1 Cor 8.7ff and 10.25ff. Although D.A. Carson's understanding of Mt 18.5-6 is more nuanced (see further below), he likewise understands the verb to refer to action which leads other disciples to serious sins (1984: 398).

exhortation to receive a fellow disciple as if one were receiving Jesus himself in his absence. The thought thus implies some sense of solidarity between Jesus and his disciples. In the frame of mind of the disciples, a messianic community without the messiah appears inconceivable, just as they could not comprehend Jesus' prediction of his suffering and death as the messiah.[21]

The disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' words which imply his absence in the community is thus the consequence of a different background of assumptions:[22] they have a perception of the role and mission of the messiah which is different from that of Jesus himself.

III. The Understanding of the Reader

With his/her post-Easter interpretative context, the reader is readily prompted by the indefinite or inclusive pronoun ("whoever," ὅς ἐὰν, 18.5f)[23] and second person

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[21] Mt 16.21; 17.22f; cf. also 20.17-19; 26.31,51-54. Even if there were progression in the understanding of the disciples with regard to Jesus' eschatological role from the end of the second discourse to the time of the eschatological discourse (so R. Gundry 1982:476; D. Patte 1987:334 and n.3; but see the contrasting view of W.C. Allen 1912:254; F.W. Beare 1981:463-64), there is no clear indication in the gospel narrative up to the time of the community discourse that the disciples have come to grips with the significance of Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection to enable them to comprehend Jesus' "departure" from the world and hence his absence from them.

[22] On meaning and background of assumption, see J.R. Searle, "The Background of Meaning" (1980).

[23] Cf. also ὅστις in Mt 18.4.

singular address (σου/σε, 18.8f)[24] to perceive that he/she is being addressed by Jesus. The reader is also perceptive of the post-Easter perspective of Jesus in speaking of "little ones" as those "who believe in me" (18.6). In addition to reading from a post-Easter vantage point, the reader's comprehension of the plot of the gospel story and its governing principles (the plotting themes that create the story) also assist him/her in understanding this passage (18.5-9) from perspective of the "total" story. The reader is thus more perceptive of Jesus' words about the Christian community.

1. *Humility and Receiving/Stumbling of Other Disciples*

In reading from a post-Easter perspective of faith, the reader perceives that the situation of the post-Easter Christian community is now being addressed. From this perspective, "little ones who believe in Jesus" is a general designation for Jesus' disciples in their humility like children (18.1-4),[25] not some insignificant disciples in the community, as the disciples in the narrative would have understood the expression. This reading is reinforced by recalling in the mission discourse (10.42) when Jesus

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[24] See D.B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (1990), 219-23, on the rhetorical narration in Matthew's Gospel that produces the literary effect of making Jesus address the reader.

[25] So also G. Barth (1963:122f), E. Schweizer (1969-70: 222f,229; 1983:138-39), W.G. Thompson (1970:119), D.A. Carson (1984:398), U. Luz (1983:110); R.T. France (1989:265), D.J. Harrington (1991:264 note 6); G.N. Stanton (1992:214-15,275-76). In their commentary (1991: 762-63) Davies and Allison are uncommitted, but on p. 227 they apparently recognize the possibility of a general designation.

called his disciples engaged in missionary work "little ones."[26]

In v 6 the dreadful eschatological destiny, which is implied to be in store for a person who causes his/her fellow disciple to fall (18.6, cf. 7-9), suggests that the "falling" caused is a serious one, that of falling from faith in Jesus. Furthermore, the contrasting sense conveyed in vv 5f indicates that receiving and stumbling are opposite way's of expressing the same reality: not to receive is to cause one's fellow disciple to fall.[27] Receiving one's fellow disciples is thus not merely an attitude of acceptance (cf. 18.10) but involving something done to them.

Nevertheless, semantic ambiguity remains in the conceiving of the act of "receiving" one's fellow disciples or "causing them to fall." In particular, in what ways are this "receiving" and "causing others to stumble" related to humility expressed in 18.1-4? These constitute a narrative gap which calls for an act of "filling in." The narrative

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[26] Εἰς in the phrase εἰς ὄνομα μαθητοῦ (and similarly in 10.41) has the (Semitic) causal sense (לשם, cf. Josh 9.9; Ezek 36.22): "because of the name of disciple"; see also 12.41: εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ. See N. Turner 1963:255, 266-67. *Contra* D. Patte 1987:156-57, since it is the reader who is being addressed, the "little ones" in 10.42 are not "ideal disciples" but simply Jesus' disciples on their missionary journey.

[27] Our interpretation is analogous to that of D.A. Carson (1984:398). In taking "receiving" in the general sense of accepting, Carson takes Mt 18.5f as conveying a contrasting picture: an attitude of acceptance or rejection: it is one's despising and rejection of a fellow disciple which cause the disciple to fall from faith in Jesus.

gap disappears when the links between various relevant narrative segments and perspectives are perceived.[28] We shall show presently that the eschatological overtone of vv 5-9 indicates a direction for understanding the receiving and stumbling of one's fellow disciples in connection with humility.

The kind of action envisaged in δέχεσθαι and σκανδαλίζειν emerges when the eschatological implications of 18.5-9 is recognized. The eschatological overtone in 18.5-9 is evidenced in the divine punishment implicit in v 6, the judgmental woe in v 7c, and the eschatological images of destinies in vv 8-9 (ζωή, γέεννα, πῦρ); in fact, eschatological destiny already looms overhead in the entrance-saying in 18.3. The eschatological judgment over the community of disciples in 18.5-9 suggests a state of affairs within the Christian community which is perceived through its members' action of "receiving" or "causing others to fall." The pointer is already there in 18.7: Jesus alludes to the necessary presence of σκάνδαλα in the community. The saying is further reminiscent of the parable of the weeds in 13.24-30,36-43; there is the presence of the "sons of the evil one" in the "kingdom of the Son of Man" and the gathering of τὰ σκάνδαλα and the workers of ἀνομία for destruction. In particular, 18.7 points to 24.4-14 which portrays the unavoidable presence of "evil" in the time before the return of Jesus.[29]

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[28] W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), 182-83.

[29] Davies and Allison 1991:764.

In 24.4-14, in which Jesus speaks of the period before his return, the reader is warned of apostasy[30] and internal strife within the Christian community as the result of external persecution and the rise of false prophets from within the community itself (24.9-13). A characteristic mark of the Christian community in the end time, then, is the rise of false prophets and the consequent multiplying of "lawlessness" (ἀνομία) which leads to love growing cold among the disciples. As the reader is situated in time between the two advents of Jesus, and in the light of Jesus' previous warning against the false prophets (7.15-23), he/she realizes that the eschatological symptoms are already present in the Christian community. "Receiving" and "causing to stumble" in 18.5-6 thus point to a communal state of affairs, namely, a general lack of love within the community. This does not mean that 18.5-9 is to be understood exclusively in terms of the work of false prophets. It does, however, mean that the growing cold of love is a disturbing element in the communal life so that this eschatological situation within the community may be taken as the frame of reference in the understanding of the sayings in vv 5-9. It is this lack of love which gives rise to various personal conflicts within the community of disciples.

The actions of receiving and not receiving become clear when the passage is read in the further light of

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[30] The context makes it quite clear that σκανδαλίζω refers to losing faith in Jesus (cf. 13.21; 26.31,33).

another eschatological passage, viz. 25.31-46. Jesus' coming in glory and the gathering of the elect briefly described in 24.29-31 is followed by the lengthy exhortation to watchfulness (24.42-25.30). The flow of thought thus suggests that the judgment scene portrayed in 25.31-46 is the *resumption* of the description in 24.29-31 of Jesus' glorious return.[31] Hence, the separation of "sheep" from "goats" in 25.31-46 explains the way the "gathering" of the elect described in 24.29-31 is brought about: it is through this separation that the elect emerge and are "gathered." Those called by Jesus "the least of my brothers" are his (true) disciples who constitute the elect, the "sheep" who are separated from the "goats."[32] The separation is based on the criterion of active concern and care for Jesus' disciples in need, for it is the outward expression of love towards one's fellow distressed disciples which discloses authentic faith. With the inclusion of visiting of those disciples in prison,[33] the

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[31] Note the repetition of the words δόξα and ἄγγελοι in Mt 24.30f and 25.31. Δέ in 25.31 is thus resumptive.

[32] The τούτων in ἐνὶ τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων in 25.40 probably signals Jesus' gesture pointing to the (true) disciples who have been separated as "sheep" from people of all nations.

[33] Whereas in pre-exilic Israelite monarchy imprisonment is not an institutionalized punishment, as a legal penalty imprisonment is known in post-exilic Judaism, probably as a borrowing of Hellenistic practice (Mt 5.25f; 11.2; 14.2,10; 18.30; cf. Ezra 7.26; Josephus, Ant. 13.294). See Z.W. Falk, *Introduction to Jewish Law of the Second Commonwealth* (1978),162-63; H.J. Boecker 1980:39,133. While there is reference to setting free of prisoners or redeeming of captives taken by foreigners in the OT and some Jewish writings (e.g. Isa 42.7; 58.5-7; T. Jos 1.4-7; CD 14.12-16), the *visiting* of prisoners is

deeds of kindness are indicative of acquaintance with the sufferers. Thus those who are indifferent to the suffering of Jesus' disciples are either non-believers and thus ignorant of or unconcerned with suffering of Jesus' disciples, or professing disciples who betray their empty faith in their self-interest and unconcerned attitude towards Jesus' disciples in distress. The criterion of separation is therefore implicitly Christological, but it is evidential and not causative.[34]

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without parallel in Judaism; cf. Jer 22.1-5; Job 31.1-40; Tob 1.16-18; 4.14-17; 5 Ezra 2.20-23; T. Ben 4.4; Test. Jacob 13.6-9; Sib. Orac. 3.2234-44; 2 Enoch (B) 42.6-7. The closest parallel is in Wisd 10.14, alluding to Joseph: "and when he was in prison, she did not leave him ..." (RSV); but the reference here ("she") is to the personified divine Wisdom (cf. Wisd 10.9).

[34] In our literary reading of Mt 25.31-46 (relating the passage with 24.29-31), both non-believers and Christians are envisaged standing before the judgment seat of the Son of man. The judgment ("separation") is based on the sole criterion of treatment of Jesus' disciples ("my least brothers") who are in need. *Contra* D.O. Via (1987:92), the persons in distress are recognized as Jesus' disciples. The separation thus singles out non-believers as well as "false believers" from people of all nations. Our reading of 25.31-46 is therefore neither a "particularist" interpretation for all the nations are under judgment, nor is it along a "universalist" line - for those referred to as the "least of Jesus' brothers" are taken to be Jesus' disciples. The depiction of the "last judgment" is therefore not a consolation and encouragement to a (Christian) community hard-pressed by the "world" outside, but warning against some self-deception within the community: a true faith in Jesus expresses itself in love among Jesus' disciples. This reading also indicates what "preparedness" in the ten maidens and "the talents" entrusted to the servants mean broadly in the preceding parables in 24.43-25.30. The interpretation offered here is in line with the purpose of the major discourses, which is that of exhortation for various aspects of discipleship. For a recent comprehensive survey of interpretations of Mt 25.31-46, see Sherman Gray, *The Least of My Brothers: Mt 25.31-46: A History of Interpretation* (1989). See also Graham Stanton, "Once More: Matthew 25.31-46" (1992); Francis Watson, "Liberating the Reader: A Theological-

There are several points of contact between 18.5-9 and 25.31-46: (1) the identification of Jesus with his disciples - "you receive me" (18.6); "you did (not do) it to me" (25.40,45); (2) the description of disciples in similar terms - "one of these little ones (οἱ μικροί) who believe in me" (18.6) and "one of these least (οἱ ἐλάχιστοι) of my brothers" (25.40; cf. 25.45)[35]; (3) Both 18.5-9 and 25.31-46 warn against false discipleship in the period between Jesus' resurrection and his return; (4) eschatological salvation or damnation entailed by the respective conduct.

From this perspective, 18.5f envisages a disciple in his/her everyday-life encounter with other disciples. The act of "receiving" describes a disciple's act of love in response to the need of his/her fellow disciples in giving out food and clothing, sheltering travelling disciples, or visiting the sick, or those in prison. Not to "receive," on the contrary, is to take no action in the sight of another disciple's predicament. It is this indifference to a disciple's affliction, indicating a lack of love in heart, which causes the disregarded disciples to fall from their faith in Jesus. Verse 18.5 thus stresses the scandalizing

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Exegetical Study of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25.31-46)" (1993).

[35] On Jesus' calling his disciples "my brothers," see 28.10, cf. 12.49f. Graham Stanton (1992:230-31) has pointed out an neglected variant in 25.40,45 (Σ 067 700 and possibly the Sahidic), omitted in NA[26], in which τῶν μικρῶν replaces τῶν ἐλαχίστων. The significance may point to some scribal interpretation which sees some link between 18.5-6 (possibly together with vv 7-9) and 24.31-45 and takes the least of Jesus brothers to be Jesus' disciples.

effect of a disciple's lack of love, an aspect which is not developed in 25.31-46. In this reading, to cause others to stumble in 18.6 is closely related to v 5 and conveys the sense of causing others to fall away from faith through *disregarding* their hardship or suffering in everyday life.[36] In 18.8f, the hand, foot and eye are metaphorical for action, or rather inaction, referring to withholding assistance to alleviate another disciple's affliction - a hand which withholds help, a foot which runs away, and an eye which sees but disregards.[37] The sense of σκανδαλίζειν in this passage is therefore causative, conveying the sense of making oneself a stumbling stone through one's indifference to other fellow disciple's affliction.[38]

With this understanding of 18.5f, the relation of vv 5-9 to the preceding verses (vv 1-4) on humility begins to emerge. As seen in chapter 6, humility is one's inner disposition towards God - an obedience to God's will and trust to God for his provision and protection in everyday life. In 18.6 the disciples are called "little ones," signifying a humility which is like children's trust and

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[36] See also E. Schweizer 1969-70:227.

[37] On sinful conduct represented by actions of hand, foot or eye, cf. Job 31.1,5,7; Prov 6.17-18; Sir 4.5. More generally, the narrative world of Matthew's Gospel depicts a Jewish culture in describing people's thought, emotion and outward conduct in terms of eye, heart, hand, foot, arm, mouth, ears, tongue, and their activities. See Bruce Malina, "The Individual and the Community - Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity" (1979), esp. 133-35.

[38] In Mt 5.29f σκανδαλίζειν takes on the usual sense of one's own stumbling in sin (adultery). See the discussion of the flow of thought of 18.5-9 in section I above.

reliance upon their parents (vv 2,5). The recognition that all things in one's possession actually come from God enables one to give and help those fellow disciples in need. A life marked by a readiness to give is thus a manifestation of a disciple's humility: one is only sharing God's bestowal of material well-being to other disciples. Divine grace is the enabling power to "receive" other disciples.

As "little ones," disciples are also weak in their faith in the time of want.[39] Jesus' words in 18.5-9 stress that one disciple cannot evade the responsibility for another disciple's falling away. For if he sees the afflictions of another disciple and does nothing to alleviate his/her predicament, he is in a sense causing him/her to fall away. And eternal damnation will be his lot. The warning is thus an exemplification of the "divine principle" in 18.2-4 that humility is the criterion of entering into the kingdom of heaven. That true humility is manifested in the assistance of the poor receives further elucidation after the discourse in the episode of the rich young man (19.16-30).

2. *Humility and Receiving Jesus*

The above understanding of 18.5f implies a sense of solidarity between Jesus and his disciples: to assist one's fellow disciples in need or to disregard them in indifference is to do it to Jesus. As Jesus is physically absent from the post-Easter Christian community after his

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[39] Cf. Mt 6.30; 8.26; 14.31.

resurrection, in speaking of receiving one's fellow disciples as if receiving Jesus (v 5) thus indicates a sense both of Jesus' paradoxical "presence" with his disciples and solidarity between Jesus and his disciples. As seen in the previous section, the disciples in the narrative also perceive some vague notion of solidarity. The reader's comprehension of "receiving" and "solidarity" with Jesus is guided by his/her perception of the teaching discourses within the plot of Matthew's story. Jesus' discourses are understood as the means which saves his disciples from their sins, and also as the embodiment of his guiding presence. But this "presence" of Jesus is only experienced in the actualization of his teaching.[40] From this vantage point "receiving Jesus" in 18.5 conveys the following sense: disciples "receive" Jesus into their lives in their understanding and committing of Jesus' teaching into practices. And this "receiving of Jesus" is actualized through one's "receiving" other disciples in the day-to-day living in obedience to Jesus' teaching. Solidarity with Jesus is therefore a thinking with Jesus and living a life after the way of Jesus by putting his teaching into practice. To receive another disciple in obedience to Jesus' teaching therefore amounts to receiving Jesus himself.

The above reading is reinforced by a feature of the

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[40] See previous discussion of the plot of Matthew's Gospel in ch. 5. The presence of the risen Jesus is also experienced in another dimension: in the disciples' gathering to seek moral guidance (18.18-20). See discussion in the next chapter.

discourses. Although each discourse has its own emphasis on the different aspects of discipleship, a common thematic thread of eschatological judgment (or separation) among the community of disciples runs through all the discourses. In particular, 7.21-23 and 25.1-13 indicate this narrative perspective of encountering the risen Jesus through his words in the mundane life. Speaking as the eschatological Judge, Jesus anticipates his rejection of false disciples: I never knew (ἔγνων) you" (7.23), "I do not know (οἶδα) you" (25.12). For any one who does not live out a life with Jesus' teaching does not know Jesus and is not known by Jesus.

Since Jesus' words are the true expression of God's will,[41] in "receiving" Jesus through obeying his words one is living in humility before God. Thus following from 18.1-4, vv 5f express a way of life which will disclose whether there is the true humility within one's heart - a life which shows a convergence of thought and action to the humility of Jesus. As an inner disposition, humility is revealed in one's obedience to the teaching of Jesus and hence to the will of God.

3. *From the Narrative World to the Real World: Message to the Reader*

Reading further into the discourse, the reader is made conscious of being "transported," as it were, from the

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[41] In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' teachings are already put forth as expressing the will of God; cf. esp. the concluding words in 7.21-27. See also Jesus' command to teach his words as one of the missionary tasks for his commissioned disciples in 28.18-20.

"story world" back into the world of the (post-Easter) Christian community which lives in the reality of the physical absence of the risen Jesus. The reader perceives that Jesus is addressing various aspects of the reality of the community. In 18.7 it is understood that Jesus' words imply the inevitable presence of σκάνδαλα even in the community of Jesus' disciples. The saying is reminiscent of the parable of the weeds (13.24-30,36-43) in which Satan is "planting" his "sons" (i.e., "sons of the evil one") into the world, including the Christian community - they are the σκάνδαλα and the workers of ἀνομία. Recognizing that Jesus is speaking to him/her concerning the situation of the post-Easter community, the reader realizes that the Devil is continuing his subversion of the redemptive work of God. Failing to stall God's plan in his Son Jesus, the devil continues his opposition of divine purpose in the post-Easter community of Jesus by "planting" his sons to cause Jesus' disciples to fall from their faith or induce some disciples to become the stumbling blocks themselves.[42] The reader is thus exhorted to be aware of becoming the agent of the "sons of the evil one" in causing their fellow disciples to fall from faith through their attitudes and conducts towards other's need or suffering.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

(1) With 18.5f on "receiving" and "believing in" Jesus, there is the first indication of the discourse that

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[42] See ch. 5 on the discussion of the plot of Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus is speaking past the disciples in the narrative to the reader from a post-Easter perspective. It is the first sign that the community discourse, like other major discourses in Matthew's Gospel, constitutes the point of narrative incoherence in the gospel story in the sense that the discourse (at least for a major portion of it) is fully comprehensible only from a post-Easter vantage point.

(2) By contrasting the reading of the post-Easter reader with the understanding of the disciples in the narrative world, the significance of the interpretive context for the comprehension of the discourse is brought to the foreground. The comprehension of the disciples in the narrative is limited by the general human inability to recall words of Jesus in the remote past which may be relevant for understanding the present speech. They are also constrained in their understanding by the context of their experience in the narrative world: they can only comprehend Jesus' speech in 18.5-9 from a perspective conditioned by their "present" experience of life in the narrative world.

(3) For the reader, 18.5-9 is read in the light of the absence of the risen Jesus from the Christian community. The interpretative framework consists of the wider perspective of post-Easter faith and the plotting themes which organize and shape the plot of the story. Comprehension by the post-Easter reader is therefore not a first-time reading of Matthew's Gospel. For such reader, vv 5-9 indicate humility as a way of life: a love and care for

fellow disciples suffering from their hardship of everyday life in order to help them sustain their faith in Jesus in the face of afflictions.

A REDACTION-CRITICAL READING

Mt 18.5-9 will now be studied from the redaction-critical perspective. As we have noted in the preceding chapter, Mt 18.1-9 has Mark 9.33-50 as its primary written source. Just as Mt 18.1-4 is notably different from Mk 9.33-37, 18.5-9 also depart markedly from Mk 9.37,38-50 as the result of Matthew's modification of his Markan source. A redaction-critical study will help us see how the evangelist transformed the Markan material to communicate an ethical message. At this point it is appropriate for us to look at the two synoptic texts closely.

I. Synoptic Comparisons

With Mark as a major written source, a comparison between the two Gospels reveals the following correspondence between Mt 18.1-9 and Mk 9.33-50:

Mk	9.33-37	~	Mt 17.24-18.4	
	9.37a	=	18.5	
	9.37b		---	
	9.38-41		---	
	9.42	=	18.6	= Q (Lk 17.2)[43]
			18.7	~ Q (Lk 17.1)
	9.43,45,47	=	18.8-9	
	9.49-50		---	

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[43] There is perhaps a Mark/Q overlaps in Mt 18.6 (cf. Lk 17.2), but apparently, Mt 18.6 is based on the Markan version of the saying. See Fitzmyer 1985:1136-37; Davies and Allison 1991:762.

As we have seen previously, there are minimal literary links between Mt 17.24-18.4 and Mk 9.33-37 (denoted by ~); only Mt 18.2 may be considered as loosely related to Mk 9.36.[44] Other verses have a greater degree of literary dependence on Mark (denoted by " = "): 18.5 = Mk 9.37a; 18.6 = Mk 9.42 (Q); 18.8-9 = Mk 9.43,45,47.

Mt 18.7 has no parallel in Mark 9.33-50. This saying corresponds roughly to Lk 17.1bc, and may be regarded as the evangelist's modification of the saying in the sayings-tradition (Q),[45] to which Matthew has added a woe to the world (Mt 18.7a) in order to make a smooth transition from v 6 to v 7b. On the other hand, Matthew has omitted Mk 9.37b (on receiving God), 9.38-41 (on the exorcist),[46] 9.48 (on Gehenna), and also the salt-saying in 9.49-50.[47] From the above synoptic comparisons, apart from omissions and addition, the evangelist is following the order in Mark 9.33-50. But Matthew has abridged and modified the traditions on the disciples' dispute on precedence among themselves. The omission of Markan material and addition of Q-saying have combined to create a different flow of

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[44] See the redaction-critical study of 18.1-4 in ch. 6.

[45] Compared with Lk 17.1b, in the Matthean version (18.7b) we have ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τὰ σκάνδαλα taking the form of a positive statement, with the addition of causal γάρ to account for the "woe" in 18.7a: explanation given in 18.7bc. For similar construction, cf. 22.14; 24.6.

[46] A version of Mk 9.41 is found in Mt 10.42. See discussion below.

[47] On Mk 9.37b cf. Mt 19.40, and Mk 9.49f cf. Mt 5.13; these omission are, perhaps, due to inclusion of similar tradition in the previous narration.

thought in Matthew's discourse from that of Mark, which, as we shall see below, entails a change of meaning in some verses.

II. Transformation of the Markan Material

In Mark, the sequence of events portrayed in 9.33-50 may be summarized as follows:

> Disciples' dispute and Jesus' teaching: true greatness as humble service (9.33-37).
>
> Attitudes towards friendly non-believers :disciples' reference to an independent exorcist and Jesus' response (9.38-42).
>
> Jesus' teaching continued - but the subject is changed to the disciples' own conduct:
> (i) Avoid one's own sins at all cost (9.43-49).
> (ii) Preserve peace among the disciples (9.50).[48]

By a combination of abridgement, editorial composition, omission and addition, Matthew has transformed the Markan sequence of events in the first part of the community discourse (18.1-9):

> Disciples' question on greatness and Jesus' reply: Humility and entering into the kingdom (18.1-4).
>
> Jesus' teaching continued:
> (i) Receiving and causing other disciples to stumble (18.5-6).
> (ii) The inevitable presence of causes of stumbling (18.7).
> (iii) Exhortation for radical avoidance of causing others to stumble (18.8-9).
>
> In removing the pericope on the exorcist from his

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[48] In Mk 8.34-9.1 (after Jesus' prediction of his passion/resurrection) there is a similar progression of thought in (1) self-denial and (2) the theme of for or against Jesus which entails either life or death. Whereas the denial of self (desire and interests) in 8.34-9.1 is directed to public confession of faith in Jesus and following the life of Jesus, here (9.33-50) it is related to the self-effacing service to others.

source, along with other changes, Matthew has transformed the Markan materials to a tradition which refers solely to community life. While the evangelist has retained Mark's usage of "little ones" as a characterization of disciples, we shall show below that the transformation suggests a different comprehension of 18.5f and 8f from the corresponding passages in Mark (9.37a,42,43,45,47).

(1) In the context of Mk 9.33-37, the receiving of "one of such child" in 9.37a refers to children,[49] and in "receiving" the socially insignificant, one's humility is revealed. Such a child is to be received "because of Jesus" (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου), in the sense that Jesus desires such humble action.[50] And since humility is underscored in one's active service (9.35), to "receive" (δέχεσθαι) such children therefore denotes an attitude of care and concern for children even if they are regarded as nonentities in society at large. Again, the solidarity between Jesus and children does not necessitate a metaphorical understanding

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[49] C.E.B. Cranfield, *Saint Mark* (1959), 308-9. The child in the Markan context (9.33-37) does not entail an understanding of "one of such children" in 9.37a as the weakest or most humble members of the Christian community; so M.D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (1991), 228. In his commentary on Mark (1993), R. Gundry takes the view: "all children who believe in Jesus" (509; see also p. 510).

[50] This is the third meaning in Cranfield's list of three plausible understandings of the Greek phrase, though Cranfield himself apparently does not commit to any definite choice within the Markan context (1959:309). "For my sake" is a possible translation of the phrase (Hooker 1991:228), but without further explanation in accordance with its context, its sense remains ambiguous. Gundry (1993:510) explains the reception on the basis of Jesus' own reception of such a child, and thus comes close to the meaning preferred here.

of children as referring to disciples.[51] The solidarity may consist in the humility which Jesus shares with children: his own obedience to the will of the heavenly Father.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Matthew has modified Mk 9.33-37 to make Jesus' words in 18.1-4 teach humility as the quality of disciples. The child is employed as the symbol of humility, and not as an object lesson for receiving some-one of no significance. In the Matthean context the expression "one such child" at 18.5 then does not convey, as in Mark, a child in the literal sense, but becomes a designation for (humble) disciples. This is perhaps indicated in Matthew's changing Mark's ἓν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων (9.37a) to the singular: ἓν παιδίον τοιοῦτο.

(2) The evangelist has omitted the pericope on the "exorcist" (9.38-42), except 9.42 which he retains at 18.6, the pericope is irrelevant for teaching a community life. Mark 9.41 (on receiving Jesus' disciples) has perhaps been utilized by Matthew in the mission discourse at 10.42. Among the redactional changes made in Mt 10.42, Matthew has replaced ὑμᾶς (in Mk 9.41) with ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων, almost certainly an "inspiration" from Mark's next verse (9.42) which contains in it the same expression οἱ μικροί ("little ones"). Both the Markan context (9.38-42) and the juxtaposition of vv 41 and 42 in particular indicate that the reference is to Jesus' disciples.

Matthew probably sees that the designation "little

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[51] J.R. Michaels 1965:37; W. Lane 1974:340.

ones" in Mk 9.42 indicates the disciples' insignificance before God - their status and natural endowment; the phrase thus implies a rebuke in Mark to the disciples' apparent self-complacency towards those who do not follow Jesus. In order to emphasize humility as the spiritual characteristic of disciples (trust in and submitting to God), the evangelist then takes over the phrase ("little ones") and follows the Markan usage as a designation of disciples (18.6,10, 14).[52]

(3) In "jumping" from Mk 9.37a to 9.42, thus dropping the pericope on the exorcist from view, Matthew has modified Mark's tradition radically and thereby creates a different flow of thought. Unlike Mk 9.41f which refer to the conduct and attitudes of "outsiders" to Jesus' disciples ("little ones"), in the context of community discourse, the parallel verses (18.5f) have the disciples in view and are concerned with their proper and improper behaviour. Thus although δέχεσθαι and σκανδαλίζειν are formed in the parallel tradition in Mark, in Matthew they have a different sense. The sense of interaction, however, may be discerned only in the light of further consideration of other relevant texts in Matthew.

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[52] In Mt 8.12 and 13.38, the phrase "sons of the kingdom" is most probably redactional; see B.D. Chilton, *God in Strength* (1977), 191-92. On the basis of the common sayings tradition (Q = Lk 13.28f), in 8.12 Matthew has similarly replaced υμᾶς in Lk 13.28c, which refers to the Jews (Mt 8.10; cf. Lk 13.22-30), with "sons of the kingdom." Thus, the evangelist has employed the term to bring to the forefront his view that the Jews as the people of God is to live a life submitting to God's rule. In this understanding of "sons of the kingdom," its use in 8.12 in referring to the Jews is therefore ironical.

Furthermore, as "one such child" in 18.5 is a reference to Jesus' disciples, not to children as in Mark (9.37), the basis of reception (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου) no longer means something like "to receive as Jesus desires or commands it" (as in Mk 9.37), but in the Matthean context the same expression (Mt 18.5) conveys a sense of "because of their confession of faith in Jesus."[53] Mt 18.5 in effect says that whoever receives one such child on the basis of his profession of faith receives Jesus.

(4) In Mk 9.43ff, following the consolation for his disciples that outsiders who caused one of his disciples to fall would heap upon themselves God's wrath (9.42), Jesus is now represented as warning at his own disciples about their own sinful behaviour. The conditional statements in Mk 9.43,45,47 indicate the fatal consequence of one's own conduct.

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[53] The phrase conveys a different sense in the different context. This sense of confession of faith in Mt 18.5 is attested in Acts. In Acts 2.38, in relation to baptism, ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόμάτί Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ means: (to be baptized) on the ground of one's confession of faith in Jesus Christ. This is supported by 22.16 in which to be baptized involves calling upon the name of Jesus. The phrase thus explains the significance of baptism as a witness to one's faith in Jesus. See also 10.48, which has replaced ἐπί with ἐν. In fact, in 2.38 some mss read ἐν. Ziesler's contention (1979:29-30) that the phrase in Acts 2.38 and 10.48 means one is "baptized" into a relationship with Christ, and hence the phrase is essentially not different from εἰς τὸ ὄνομα, is not convincing. In Acts 9.14,21; 22.16, to call upon the name of Jesus has the general sense of confessing faith in Jesus, not specifically denoting a belonging to Jesus (although that is implied). But more important, baptizing into a relationship does not suit the context of 2.38; 10.48. If the expressions with ἐπί, ἐν, εἰς in Acts relating to baptism (2.38; 8.16; 10.48; 19.3-5) mean the same thing, they refer more likely to the confession of faith in Jesus.

In Matthew, the flow of thought is very different. Mt 18.8-9 follows v 7 on the inevitable presence of σκάνδαλα with a lament concerning those who have become a stumbling block. In these two verses the evangelist has altered Mark's conditional clause, ἐάν + subjunctive, to εἰ + indicative. In following 18.7 the conditional form in Matthew has a contingent force referring to occasions of stumbling which presuppose the general truth expressed in 18.7. The Matthean context thus suggests that σκανδαλίζειν in vv 8f has a *causative* force.[54] Instead of the usual sense, as in Mark, of referring to one's sinful conduct (Mk 9.43,45,47), Mt 18.8f mean that if your conduct or attitude has caused you to become a stumbling stone to other disciples, drastic action must be taken to avoid it at all cost.

III. Concluding Remarks

(1) Matthew's taking over of the Markan use of οἱ μικροί ("little ones") has reinforced our literary reading that "little ones" in Mt 18.5-9 is a general designation for Jesus' disciples. The use of οἱ μικροί, ἀδελφός (in 18.15-35), and οἱ μαθηταί (18.1) collaboratively indicates that Jesus' instruction of community life is for all of his disciples, not just for the "leaders" within the Christian community.[55]

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[54] See also Thompson 1970: 116-18.

[55] See also ch. 6 on the redaction-critical reading of Mt 18.1-4.

(2) On the other hand, the different literary context and the flow of thought created in Matthew cause certain words and phrases to convey a meaning different from that of the parallel text in Mark. The synoptic comparisons have revealed Matthew's radical modifications of his source, but the meaning of the transformed tradition, especially that of vv 5f, can only be construed from Matthew's redactional text and its relation to part of the eschatological discourse, as is seen from the literary reading of Mt 18.5-9.

Thus, apart from the clarification of the meaning of "little ones" (as far as authorial intention is concerned), the role of redaction-criticism in the interpretative process (in this passage) is seen primarily as highlighting the way in which Matthew both selected and shaped the Jesus tradition to suggest a different direction in the evangelist's perception of it. But the construal of this meaning as a whole appears beyond the working methodology of redaction-criticism. Meaning is seen as locating in the interrelationship of the narrative text. The comprehension process at work is illustrated in our literary reading of 18.5-9.

A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING

In looking at 18.5-9 from a social-scientific perspective, we shall see the "historical meaning" of the text is enriched with insights provided by social sciences. From the vantage point of Matthew, the present passage can

be understood as a further expression of the self-conception of the community of Jesus' disciples, initially defined in terms of humility (18.1-4). In 18.5-9 Matthew provides further vocabulary for his group to express its collective self-understanding and the meaning of community in response to its being socially alienated as "deviant" within the Jewish community.

I. Community Ethos and Self-Designation

As we have seen in 18.1-4, Matthew insists that the ethos of the community should consist in an orientation of mind characterized by humility.[56] The sense of humility intended is conveyed through the image of children in their dependence upon and submission to their parents. In 18.5f using Jesus traditions, the children symbolism is carried further. Disciples' identification with children is verbalized through the use of the phrase "little ones" as their self-designation.

As we have seen in chapter 4, from the social-psychological point of view, the discourse is essentially an intra-group communication, and speech convergence in intra-group communication helps facilitate both effective communication and enhances the sense of solidarity. The use of the community language is an instance of speech accommodation. As a favourite self-designation in the community, "little ones" evokes a sense of a common bond

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[56] See the social-scientific reading of Mt 18.1-4 in ch. 6.

among members of the community and verbalizes the various feelings of the community as a whole.

The social significance of the designation "little ones" lies in its explicit identity-giving function. If humility has become the way of life of the Matthean Christians, the designation represents the collective self-image: they are "little ones" before the heavenly Father, like children who are dependent upon and obedient to their parents (18.1-4). "Little ones" as a self-designation of Jesus' disciples also appears in vv 10 and 14. There the "little one" in view is the disciple who has gone astray, but is nonetheless valued by God.

In relation to one another, the designation sums up the proper way every member of the Matthean community should regard one another: they are Jesus' "little ones" each needing the help of the others.[57]

In relation to the outside world, the designation marks the community as "a community of little ones." In the eyes of the world Jesus' disciples are indeed "little ones," people of no account. In the face of the world's valuation, the self-designation thus binds the disciples psychologically as a group which holds on to a different value from the world: "we are a community of little ones" characterized by humility.

In view of the general failure of the Jewish mission, the designation represents the community's unified response: "we are Jesus' little ones who believe in him."

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[57] See discussion in the next section.

Since unbelieving Jews are no longer thought to be fit to be called "sons of the kingdom" (cf. 8.12), the Matthean disciples are the true "sons of the kingdom" (13.38) who submit themselves to their heavenly Father through living a life in obedience to the teaching of Jesus. The self-designation thus generates a sense of communal identity.

II. Community Ethos and Receiving Others

The term "little ones" would also be linguistically apt to counter the thinking about rank and power which was perceived by Matthew to be undermining the community ethos of doing the will of God as the proper way to live.

In 18.5-9, the evangelist indicates an important aspect of community life which would issue from the group ethos. A life of humility which is pleasing to God is one that "receives" any "little one" in the community simply because of the person's confession of faith in Jesus (18.6). Given the community context, it is plausible that this "receiving" refers to general fellowship among the community members, accepting any disciple of Jesus as a member of the community.

The concomitant demand not to cause a fellow disciple to "stumble" (18.6) probably means, for the Matthean Christians, not to cause by one's action or words any disciple of Jesus to feel rejected and eventually to leave the group by abandoning the faith. This reading of v 6 has significant bearing upon the related sense of the preceding verse. In the light of v 6, the mutual "receiving" (v 5)

then conveys for the Matthean community a sense of "action," and thus the further meaning of succouring those members who are in need as they fare the hardship of everyday life. The motivation is expressed in 18.5: "whoever receives one such child receives me." In the context of the community ethos of doing the will of God, solidarity with the *risen* Jesus lies in the communion between Jesus and his disciples, a communion which consists in the disciples' living with Jesus' words. Since the disciple thinks and acts with the thought of Jesus, to receive such a disciple is to "receive" Jesus himself.

In the communal context, the meaning of σκανδάλιζειν in 18.8f may then take the plausible sense of guarding against becoming a stumbling-block to others in the community, rather than the usual sense of referring to warning against one's own sinful conduct.

From the sociological point of view, v 5 reaffirms that "admission" into the community is based simply on confession of faith in Jesus. And this is how the community would appear to the outside world: its "public face" is that of a group of followers of Jesus.[58] But for the community, its members would recognize that more is required of them than merely a common belief and faith in Jesus. The community's "private face" can only be experienced in community life. For the evangelist and his

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[58] On the division of a community boundaries into the outer "public face" and inner "private face," see Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), 74-75.

fellow members who perceive life as a doing of God's will (ethos), communal life involves a fellowship of love and mutual concern for each other in the living of everyday life (18.5f). Such community life would foster a sense of community spirit, that is, a sense of belonging. The warm and stable relationship within the community would provide for its members security and solidarity against the pressure to conform to the values and thinking of the world outside.

III. Reading/Listening Experience: A Response from the Community

This pressure to conform is particularly acute for Matthew's community which is looked upon as "deviant" in the Jewish community. Living in day-to-day social interaction with unbelieving Jews, the community of Matthew encountered a common problem which people who are being looked upon as deviants will generally face in their broader societies, namely, the images of deviants and deviance in the eye of the "conventional" people. Deviancy becomes the *master status* of those regarded as "deviant." It is often generalized that some *other* undesirable character traits or nonconformative values and conduct are also associated with the particular deviant behaviour or belief in view.[59] It is as if the deviant's whole personality were "spoiled" by the particular deviant belief

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[59] This is what Edwin Lerment called "putative deviation" (1951:56).

or/and conduct.[60] Once their deviant conduct or thinking have become publicly known, deviants often experience various degree of social ostracism and hence generally have some difficulty in social participation.

In response to its being socially ostracized as a deviant group, 18.5-9 evoked in members of the Matthean community a sentiment, protesting that apart from their belief and faith in Jesus - their "deviant belief" from the viewpoint of unbelieving Jews, - followers of Jesus do not abandon or subvert Jewish tradition and faith. They practise the same Jewish pieties, even outdoing the Jews who did not believe in Jesus (6.1-18; cf. 9.15). They shared the same scriptures and monotheistic belief, were obedient to the law of Moses in its true intention (cf. 5.13-48), and therefore should not be treated as "outsiders." Indeed, as expressed in 18.5-9, members of the community are explicitly instructed to help their fellow disciples who are in distress, a way of life which is in line with Jewish piety. In modern sociological terms, then, the passage reflects a feeling of a deviant group's refutation of "putative deviation".[61]

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[60] See Howard Becker, *Outsider* (1963),32-34.

[61] In its total withdrawal from the Jewish society, the Qumran community apparently lacked this element of protesting sentiment. Apart from its beginning history, the community apparently saw itself not *being* alienated. In willingly secluding themselves from the rest of the Jewry for the study and practice of Torah they were indeed preparing for the way of the Lord - seeing their community life as the positive fulfilment of Isa 40.3 (cf. 1QS 8.12-16).

IV. Concluding Remarks

(1) Our sociological interpretation of 18.5-9 approaches the text from the perspective of Matthew's community which felt ostracized as "deviant" by the broader Jewish community, using insights drawn from modern studies of social deviance. The term "little ones" evokes for the first audience a variety of feelings associated with collective self-identity. In particular, as a *deviantized* group, the designation serves, if unconsciously, to express, maintain and generate the social ethos of the community.

Our sociological reading is therefore referential, seeing an extra-textual reality behind the gospel narrative. The reading is essentially a form of reader-oriented reading. Equipped with the modern study of community and social deviance, it seeks to understand the text by looking at it from the vantage point of the evangelist, reading with him the community experience of a group being socially alienated.

(2) Our reading of 18.5-9 from the perspective of members of the Matthean community, though essentially a construction in a modern reading, has highlighted the possible difference that might arise between the meaning intended by the gospel author and the in-take of "meaning" by his original recipients. This difference has significant implications for a modern reader-response approach to the ancient text like Matthew's Gospel.

In relation to the community discourse, the meaning of

a sentence or a segment of the discourse is a function of the (i) the range of lexical meanings of its component words and their syntax, (ii) the interpretative context of the reader, including his/her social location. The different reading by the original (intended) reader and modern reader is primarily the result of perceiving significance of the text in different interpretative contexts. Thus, as we have seen, the phrase "little ones" may invoke among the first readers/audience a sense of communal identity, and the entire passage (18.5-9) may induce a feeling of protest at being regarded as deviant by the broader Jewish community because of the group's belief and faith in Jesus. For modern (Christian) readers, unless they form a cohesive group and are facing similar situations as the original audience, such identity and emotional value of the text would not be present in their readings.

(3) In our sociological reading, it is also important to note that in emphasizing the communal sense of the passage, we come to a meaning of 18.5-9 which is quite similar to that obtained in the preceding literary reading.

Chapter 8

INTERPRETATION OF MT 18.10-20

A LITERARY READING

In the previous chapter, it has been shown that Jesus' words in 18.5-9 explicate humility in terms of an inner disposition to assist fellow disciples who are in need. Such act of "receiving" reflects a humility which recognizes one's own dependency upon God for all his provisions. Verses 10-20 continue to elaborate other aspects of humility in the disciples' community life.

I. The Flow of Thought

18.10 opens with an asyndetic command not to despise (Ὁρᾶτε μὴ καταφρονήσητε) "one of these little ones." The phrase "one of these little ones" is repeated in v 14 which thus forms an *inclusio* with v 10. In contrast to 18.1-14, in which disciples are described in "children" imageries (τὰ παιδία, οἱ μικροί), in vv 15-35 ἀδελφός becomes the designation of disciples. Most New Testament commentators therefore see in 18.14/15 the demarcation of a twofold structure of the discourse (18.1-14,15-35).[1] While lexical

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[1] See, for example, R. Pesch 1963:220, D. Patte 1987:247-58, D.J. Harrington 1991:265, Davies and Allison 1991:750-52, D.E. Garland 1993:187-88, and apparently M. Davies 1993:127-30. Important exceptions are W.G. Thompson (1970:187-88) who sees that division at 18.14/15 does not do justice to the thought sequence in 18.10-14,15-20; Gundry (1982: 358), refrains from partitioning the discourse because of Matthew's melding together smoothly the various subtopics throughout the discourse; and R.A. Edwards, in his reader-oriented reading of Matthew (1985:65-67), is not concerned with the "structure" of the

repetition and variation may generally function as a cohesive tie to link and shape segments of text into a continuous discourse,[2] it is not clear in the present text that they function as some "structural marker," especially in view of the fact that Matthew's Gospel is characterized by highly repetitive language.[3]

In our view, discernment of proper thematic segments in the major discourses should not be decided on the basis of vocabulary alone. To conceive the presence of οἱ μικροί and ἀδελφός as signs for a twofold structure of the discourse actually obscures rather than reveals the progession of thought in the text.[4] Descriptive textual features such as the recurrence of οἱ μικροί and ἀδελφός

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discourse.

[2] Apart from cohesion through lexical ties, other cohesive connectives in the discourse are: causal link: "for" (γάρ), 18.10,20, and serving the same end, "truly I say to you" in 18.18; inferential: "so" (οὕτως), 18.14, 35; progressive connection: "and" (δέ, καί), "again" (πάλιν) in 18.13,15-17,19. On formation of a continuous text and general text-structure devices, see Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (1996), 80-82, 111-16. See also the discussion of flow of thought in chapter 6.

[3] See U. Luz *Matthew 1-7* (1989), 36-37,192. The only repetitious expressions that have a clear structure-marking function are the formulaic phrases at 7.28; 11.1; 13.53; 19.1; 26.1 which manifestly mark the end of Jesus' speech in each of the five discourses and serve also as the transition to the narration that follows. J.D. Kingsbury's three-fold division of Matthew's narrative at 4.17 and 16.21 is essentially a static biographical outline (1975: ch.1). Such outline, however, is a framework imposed on a "conflict story." On Kingsbury's own term that Matthew's Gospel is a "conflict story" (1988:2-3; 1992:347), it is by no means obvious that the story of conflict suggests that the phrases ἀπὸ τότε (at 4.17 and 16.21; cf. also 26.16) signal the way the plot of the story is developed.

[4] See also W.G. Thompson 1970:188.

(as designation for disciples) within the community discourse highlight certain characteristics of discipleship in relation to community life, but they do not necessarily indicate a change of subject matter. Similarly, the literary device of *inclusio* (18.10,14) may not always be a sure criterion for division of the text. *Inclusio* can be intimately linked with what follows,[5] and each occurrence must be considered in its own merit.[6] As we have repeatedly emphasized, in discerning any "division" of narration it is more pertinent to pay attention to the narrative movement.[7] We shall show below that on the basis of the cohesion and progression of thought, 18.10-20 instead form a more plausible segment of narration.

In 18.10-14,[8] the *inclusio* marked by "one of these

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[5] For an inclusio within a larger unified passage, see, Mt 7.15-23: the inclusio vv 16-20 ("you will know them by their fruits") is "sandwiched" between vv 15 and 21-23. See Davies and Allison 1988:693-94; Ulrich Luz 1989:439-40 for convincing arguments in support of the thematic unity of 7.15-23; cf. also Garland 1993:88-89. See also Mt 14.13-36 enclosed by a "thematic inclusio" at 14.14, 34-36; yet 14.1-36 forms the first cycle of the three hostility-withdrawal narrative movements (15.1-39; 16.12). See D.J. Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader" (1992), esp, 6-7.

[6] See ch. 6 above for the discussion of the flow of thought of Mt 18.1-4 which is enclosed within the *inclusio* formed by the Mathean diction the "kingdom of heaven."

[7] See the discussion of the flow of thought of Mt 18.1-4 and 5-9 in chs. 6,7 resp. Although G. Bornkamm (1970: esp. 39-43) does not rely heavily on the recurrence of οἱ μικροί, ἀδελφός for "structural division," his redaction-critical approach leads him to treat 18.15-20 as essentially congregational discipline in tone and thought to the neglect of the continuity of thought conveyed in 18.10-20.

[8] Verse 11 is absent in ℵ B L Θ $f^{1,13}$ 33, 892 *et al*; it is generally regarded as a gloss inspired by Lk 19.10 and omitted in modern critical edition (NA^{26}, NA^{27}).

little ones" (vv 10,14) suggests that the "little one" despised is the disciple who has gone astray,[9] represented in the parable by the sheep which has strayed from the flock.[10] This reading is reinforced by the sequence of thought in 18.10,12-13: the imperative (v 10a) followed by a clause (v 10b) giving the ground (γάρ) for the command,[11] and illustrated by a parable (vv 12-13).[12] The narrative flow is thus: since every disciple is of equal worth before God (οὕτως), it is the divine will that the straying one be sought and not despised, lest he/she should perish.

In 18.15-20 we have the same motif of seeking: the seeking of a brother who has sinned. The seeking, initially

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[9] Bornkamm 1970:42; Garland 1993:190. Reading 18.10 without relating it to what follows results in a false impression that the verse is about caring for "insignificant" disciples, so M'Neile 1915:264; similarly Hill: "contempt for childlike believers" (1972:274); Gundry: "little people in the church" (1982:365), Lambrecht 1991:52: "weak and marginal Christians."

[10] The use of the neuter ἕν in "one of these little ones" in 18.14 instead of εἷς (cf. the variant readings in W Θ 078 et al), as in 18.6 (ἕνα; cf. ἑνὸς in 18.10), is probably due to attraction to πρόβατα (18.12) and points to the association of the sheep with the "little ones" in 18.10,14.

[11] The worth of "little ones" before God is the ground for not despising any of them, expressed in the imagery of the divine court in which the angels of the "little ones" have constant access to the divine presence. On the roles of protection and intercession given to some angels, see A. Piñero, "Angels and Demons in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve" (1993), 199-201.

[12] Cf. Mt 7.1-5 and 7.7-11, which exhibit the same narrative pattern (but without the *inclusio*). For the connection of thought in 18.10-14, see W.G. Thompson 1970:164 (but cf. p.153); D.E. Garland 1993:190; M. Davies 1993:128. The sequence of thought in Mt 18.10-14 is overlooked by D. Patte (1987:250-52), Davies and Allison (1991:768-76), and by R.A. Edwards in his reader-oriented reading (1985:65-67).

expressed in parabolic language in vv 12-13, is realized in the real-life counterpart described in vv 15-17 about restoring an erring brother by showing and convincing (ἔλεγκειν) him of "sins" committed (18.15-17). This thematic continuity is clearly seen in the correspondence of thought between the two passages:

(1) A sheep gone astray (v 12)	A brother sinned (v 15a),
(2) To find the sheep (v 13)	To gain a brother (v 15),
(3) Possibility of continued straying implied (v 14)	An unrepentent disciple likened to a gentile and a toll-collector (v 17).

Thus, 18.15-20 convey a progression of thought from the preceding verses (10-14), and the two form a larger segment on the theme of seeking (18.10-20): (i) "straying" is a straying into sins,[13] and conversely, "sin" is a straying; (ii) having exhorted his community to care for the straying "little ones," Jesus then outlines a "progressive" approach which indicates how the community should go about its attempt to save a wayward disciple; (iii) vv. 18-20 expound the ground of the authority of the community judgment.[14]

18.10-20 are therefore concerned with the general issue of how the Christian community should deal with one of its own who has sinned,[15] and not with reconciliation

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[13] So Thompson 1970:163; Hill 1972:274.

[14] While not adhering to the twofold structure (18.1-14, 15-35), D.A. Hagner (1995:514-15,526-34) treats 18.15-20 as essentially unrelated to the preceding verses (10-14).

[15] So Thompson 1970:176-77; Schweizer 1972:369-70.

between the offender and the one offended.[16] The problem of restoration of fellowship is dealt with in 18.21-35 by the teaching on forgiveness.[17]

In linking 18.15-17 with 10-14 as the continuation of the theme of seeking a strayed disciple, the thrust of vv 15-17 is therefore not disciplinary, but *pastoral*.[18] As we shall see, the recognition of the pastoral character of 18.10-20 suggests a positive understanding of the community pronouncement in 18.17b.

Our reading of 18.10-20 also helps to solve the

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[16] On common exegetical view that Mt 18.15 is about personal offence and reconciliation, see, e.g., Allen 1912:197,199; Filson 1971:201; Beare 1981:379; Gundry 1982:367-68; Edwards 1985:66; Patte 1987:252; Davies and Allison 1991:781-82; Garland 1993:191-92 (but cf. p.193); M. Davies 1993:129; Saldarini 1994:92,102.

[17] If, assuming the contrary, 18.15-20 is about personal offence and reconciliation, the sequence of thought with 18.21-35 would appear quite incomprehensible and even contradictory on an ethical level: (1) If the offending disciple refuses to acknowledge wrong doing, some sort of "social ostracism" would be imposed on him/her (18.15-20); (2) but then in vv 21-35 we have Peter asking about forgiveness and Jesus' insistence on unlimited forgiving. As pointed out by C.J.A. Hickling (1982:259), on the premise that both passages are about personal offence and reconciliation, they would be making diametrically opposed points. We therefore cannot concur with Davies and Allison (1991:782 n.3, 791-92) in their reading of 18.15-35 (representing the common view that 18.15-17 is about personal offence). Their reading seems prejudged by a preference for the text of 18.15 which includes εἰς σέ.

[18] Although G. Bornkamm regards Mt 18.15-20 as "disciplinary instruction" and "legal proceeding," he emphasizes that since the passage are set in the context of searching for the straying one and of demand for unlimited forgiveness (18.10-14,21-35). Church discipline, the "exclusion of the obdurate sinner" is an extreme measure and not to be exercised for the sake of attaining a "holy remnant" (1970:39-46). So also E. Schweizer, stressing the pastoral concern of "winning over of the sinners" (1975:373). See also Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel* (1964),123.

textual ambiguity of εἰς σέ in 18.15. The textual evidence appears to be evenly balanced.[19] Textual-critically, εἰς σέ can be taken as an application of the unspecified verb ἁμάρτανειν, possibly influenced by 18.21 (ἁμαρτήσει εἰς ἐμέ). On the other hand, the omission may be explained as a deliberate broadening of the meaning of "to sin."[20] Without sufficient attention to the flow of thought in 18.10-20, it is difficult to resolve the textual problem with reasonable confidence. In view of the continuity of thought delineated above, "sin" in 18.15a is a straying and therefore not a reference to personal offence. It thus appears more plausible that the Greek εἰς σέ is not part of the original text at 18.15a,[21] which simply reads: Ἐὰν δὲ ἁμαρτήση ὁ ἀδελφὸς σου.

II. The Understanding of the Disciples in the Narrative

As Jesus continued, the disciples soon came to recognize that, through answering their question on

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[19] εἰς σέ is witnessed by some later Alexandrian mss (notably L 33), the western tradition (D and the entire Latin codices), f^{13}, W θ Δ, the Byzantine textual traditions, syrian and coptic versions (sy mae bo^{pt}). On the other hand, it is absent from the earliest uncials ℵ B, as well as from f^{1}; the shorter reading is supported by some coptic version (pc sa bo^{pt}) and the Alexandrian fathers (Origen, Cyril).

[20] See Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary* (1971), 45. On both reading, the scribal error is intentional, rather than accidental.

[21] So Thompson 1970:176, n.1; Hill 1972:275; Schweizer 1975:369; France 1985:274; Gnilka 1988:136; Harrington 1991:268; *against* Gundry 1982:367; Davies/Allison 1991:782 n.3.

greatness in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus continued to address them on humility as it should be realized in a future community life. For, while all the time they had been on the move with Jesus in his preaching itinerary,[22] they now heard Jesus speaking of a disciple who had gone astray and must be sought after, the general "procedure" of restoring such a wayward disciple, and the moral authority of the community.[23]

As comprehension is largely dependent upon the sharing of a common perception of "reality" between audience and the speaker, the extent to which the disciples understood Jesus' words needs to be judged as to whether such a common frame of reference is present among them. In view of their incomprehension and perplexity at what Jesus has said concerning his messiahship,[24] the disciples were probably imbued with popular belief of messiah who will gather the righteous remnant of Israel.[25] Thus, they would find it

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[22] In the narrative which depicts an overview of the work of Jesus (4.12-11.1), the picture conveyed is a wandering Jesus accompanied by a band of followers; cf. 5.1; 8.18-27; 9.9-13,18f; 9.35-10.1. For the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples up to the community discourse, see 12.1-17.27.

[23] If we take Mt 18.17 to be disciplinary in force, the disciples probably understood the words "let such a person be to you as a gentile and a toll-collector" to mean a severing of social ties with the unrepentant disciple.

[24] cf. Mt 16.21-23; 17.22f.

[25] Two psalms from the *Psalms of Solomon* describe the Davidic Messiah gathering a holy people and directing them in the works of righteousness (17.26-27,32,40-41; 18.6-9). In 1 Enoch 62.13-16, only the righteous and the chosen ones can dwell with the Son of Man; and T. Levi 18.9-11 speaks of the end of sin under the eschatological priest.

incomprehensible that the messianic community would still be tainted by "sin" - that there would still be some members of the messianic community going astray. For in their mind the unrighteous would have no place in the kingdom of the messiah.[26]

Moreover, their perplexity about Jesus' absence from his community, which he implied a moment ago (18.5-9),[27] would once again be aroused when they heard him speaking of their gathering "in his name," envisaging a future when he would not be in their midst (18.20). Yet, paradoxically, the same words also imply his "presence" with them in some sense: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them." This presence of Jesus is the ground for their prayer being answered in their gathering, and thus the moral authority of the community (18.19f). While the disciples were familiar with some notion of the presence of God among the people of Israel,[28]

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[26] So in Mt 3.11f John the Baptist envisions the "coming one" as the purging Judge (cf. 11.2-6). In the Parables of Enoch, the Son of Man as the eschatological Judge condems sinners before him and assigns them to the place of "darkness" (1 Enoch 46.1-8). On the fate of sinners, see also 1 Enoch 62.1-16; Pss Sol 13.11.

[27] See the discussion in ch. 7 of 18.5-9 on the the understanding of the disciples in the narrative.

[28] For the disciples, Jesus' words recall Israel's conviction that the temple at Jerusalem was God's earthly dwelling place (Tob 1.4; 2 Macc 14.35; Wisd 9.8; 4Q504 frag.1-2, 4.2-12; Pss 46.4-7; 74.2; 132.1-5,13f; Isa 1.12-17; 8.18; 37.14-16; Joel 3[4].17; 1 Kings 8.10-13; Ezra 1.3; Mt 23.21 (cf. 5.35). Cf. also Ex 25.8f; 29.44-46; Num 7.89; Dt 23.10-14. There is probably evidence for a Jewish belief in the first-century A.D. in which divine presence is extended beyond the sanctuary: the divine presence resides among the pious of Israel, a notion similar to that expressed in m.Abot 3.2 ("If two sit together and the words

it is far from clear that, at the time when they were still groping to apprehend divine salvation in the person and work of Jesus, they would have perceived in what sense Jesus' "presence" could be experienced when he would actually be absent from them.

Successful verbal communication in a given context occurs when there is a common background of assumptions shared between the speaker and the audience.[29] Yet it is precisely this lack of a common frame of reference that impedes the disciples in the narrative from comprehending Jesus' speech.

III. The Understanding of the Reader

However, from the reader's perspective, the disciples' incomprehension cannot be attributed solely to their preconceptions. As we have seen above, Mt 18.10-20 exhibits most prominently the contextual incongruity of the community discourse. Here Jesus speaks from a post-Easter perspective concerning situations in the Christian community which are beyond the horizon and experience of the disciples as it is portrayed in the gospel narrative.

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between them are of Torah, then the Shekhinah is in their midst," cf. also 3.3,6) and in Abot de Rabbi Nathan B34 ("If two or three sit together in the market place and the words between them are of Torah then the Shekhinah is revealed to them"). See T.Joseph 10.2-3 (cf. Gen 26.24; Ex 3.12; Josh 1.5). For the Qumran sectarians, the community itself is believed to constitute the valid (temporary) "temple" (1QpsHab 12.4-5; 1QS 8.4-10; 1QH 6.22-31; cf. Isa 28.14-17; see also 1QM 7.6-7; 10.1-4. and cf. Dt 23.14). See Joseph Sievers 1981; B.M. Bokser 1985; Bruce Chilton 1982:52-56, 69-75.

[29] See J.R. Searle, "The Background of Meaning" (1980).

The disciples' puzzle and incomprehension are therefore understandable.

But even for the reader, there are also ambiguities in Jesus' words. What are the "sins" which the straying disciple is accused of (18.15)? What does treating the unrepentant disciple as a gentile and a toll-collector (18.17) entail for both the disciple and the Christian community as a whole? Like the disciples in the narrative, the reader is confronted with the problem of understanding Jesus' "presence" when "two or three are gathered in his name" (18.20) while he is physically absent from them. The community authority of "binding and loosing" (18.18) evokes the question as to the relationship between the community authority and the authority bestowed to Peter in 16.18. And, how are 18.10-20 related to the theme of humility (18.1-4)?

Thus, while the overall flow of thought in 18.10-20 is clear, the text raises a number of questions for the reader which cannot be resolved without reference to other parts of the story. As a process of comprehension the reading takes the form of filling in the "gaps" in the text. We shall show below that this whole complex of questions requires almost the entire gospel story to fill in the narrative gaps. The meaning of this part of the discourse will emerge when plausible inferences are made out of the connections synthesized.[30]

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[30] See discussion in ch. 2 of the literary reading, consisting of both the narrative criticism, and a modified form of W. Iser's reader-response criticism.

1. *The "Sins" of the Disciples*

The nature of the "sin" (18.15a) is unspecified in vv 10-20. But since the disciple is taken before the entire community the "sin" in question is probably something substantial and serious. It is plausible that the "straying" of the disciples in 18.10-14 refers to a disciple in danger of apostasy.[31] But in taking these sayings together with what follow (vv 15-20) it becomes evident that repudiation of faith in Jesus is not in view.[32] For it is of the nature of the matter that outright apostasy is obvious and does not require convincing and be confirmed by the entire community. It is also apparent that outright immorality is not in view; obvious immoral conduct does not need hard persuasion, even requiring the judgment of the whole community.

As the straying and sinfulness spoken of at 18.10,15 are specifically related to disciples, the sin is most probably something related to the "failure" in discipleship. Such an understanding of sinfulness has both a broader and a narrower sense. The "sin" conceived has a narrower sense because it is applied only to the Christian community, and yet it has a broader sense in that for the disciples "sinfulness" is not restricted to immorality *per se*. To

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[31] So, e.g., Gundry 1982:365,367; Davies/Allison 1991: 773.

[32] *Contra* J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (1963), 39-40, who understands that apostasy is in view in the context of 18.15-17. As we shall show in our discussion of 18.17b, in the narrative context of Matthew's Gospel calling an "unrepentant" disciple a gentile or a toll-collector does not necessarily imply apostasy.

construe the meaning of sin spoken of involves the process of filling in the narrative gap in this part of the discourse. In what follows we shall attmept to relate "sinfulness" in 18.10-20 with the characterization of the disciples through their words and acts.

In the exposition of the "gospel of the kingdom" (4.23) as divine grace and demand, the Sermon on the Mount in effect unveils the "hidden" reality of sins from which Jesus' people are to be delivered (cf. 1.21). In Jesus' teaching on the mount, ἀνομία (7.23) denotes not only actions but motives and thought which violate God's commands.[33] And since Jesus' teaching embodies God's will,[34] ἀνομία is therefore a comprehensive term for deeds and thoughts which depart from Jesus' teaching.

As the story unfolds, Jesus' further demands for his disciples become clearer. While the disciples are shown as faithful followers of Jesus (at least until Jesus' arrest), they are also portrayed as falling short of his demands of discipleship. The "merit" and "failure" of the disciples are better perceived when they are contrasted with two other characters in the gospel story, the "Jewish outcasts" and the "Jewish leaders." In Matthew's story the Jewish outcasts are "sinners" (9.13), represented by toll-

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[33] Mt 5.21-48; 7.21-23; cf. 12.50. Hence, "sins" is also designated as "debts" (τὰ ὀφειλήματα) in 6.12. On the usage of ἀνομία in Matthew's Gospel, see James Davison, "Anomia and the Question of an Antinomian Polemic in Matthew" (1985).

[34] Cf. esp. Mt 5.21-48; 7.21-27; 11.25-30; 28.19f.

collectors and prostitutes.[35] They are "stock" characters[36] who as a group represent those who persist in doing evil, wilfully spurning God's covenant with Israel, and are thus regarded as beyond the pale of salvation.[37] In the epithet thrown at Jesus as a "friend of toll-collectors and sinners" (11.19), this stock character is thus portrayed as the embodiment of sins.

As a character group the Jewish leaders[38] are portrayed differently in order to reveal another dimension of sins, a characterization which is inextricably woven into the plot of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders.[39] The religious leaders are "flat" characters[40]

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[35] Hence the lumped expressions "toll-collectors and sinners" (9.11; 11.19), "toll-collectors and prostitutes" (21.31f).

[36] "Stock" character is the character that exhibits only a single trait in a narrative; see M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1981), 185.

[37] On Jewish "sinners," see E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (1977), 142-43,342-45,351-55,361,399-406; "Jesus and the Sinners" (1983), 8-9,11-14. D.C. Allison, "Jesus and the Covenant" (1987),68-69.

[38] The group comprises those who occupy positions of authority in Jewish society: the Herodian king, chief priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, elders - the "scribes and Pharisees" are specifically referred to as "leaders" (ὁδηγοί) in 15.14; 23.16,24. Despite the historical origins and the conflicting interests of the various groups, they are treated as a single character in Matthew's Gospel in that they form a united front in their opposition to Jesus, as witnessed in the phrase "the Pharisees and Saducees" (3.7; 16.1,6,11). See Kingsbury 1987:58; 1988:17-18,115; C. Clifton Black 1989: 606,617.

[39] Cf. Mt 12.1-16.21; 21.12-23.39. On the inseparable relation between characterization and the governing principles which create and shape the story, see C. Clifford Black, "Depth of Characterization and Degree of Faith in Matthew" (1989), 608-9. See also Mary Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character* (1978), 12-18.

whose personal traits manifest a common root of "wickedness."[41] This wickedness is perceptible in their various expressions of "hypocrisy," revealing (1) an outward piety unrelated to inner motive or attitude,[42] (2) a differentiated commitment to God's commands,[43] (3) an inconsistency in which one relates to God in one way and to people in another,[44] and (4) blindness to one's flaws, believing in one's righteousness before God.[45] The Jewish leaders are "evil" in another way: in their opposition to Jesus they are actually in alliance with the Devil, if

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[40] Imputed with various character traits constructed around one or a small number of qualities, a "flat" character, in E.M. Forster's conception (*Aspects of the Novel* [1954], 67,78), never changes his/her root personal quality and hence never *surprises* the reader. In Matthew's narrative, the Jewish leaders are consistently portrayed in a negative light and never surprise the reader in what they "think" and "do." See J.D. Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict between Jesus an the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel" (1987), 58-64; C. Clifton Black, 1989:616-18.

[41] The epithet of "brood of vipers" is applied to the "Pharisees and Saducees" in the pronouncemnet of John the Baptist in the prologue (Mt 3.7f). The same label is applied by Jesus to the Pharisees and the scribes and its symbolic meaning is clarified: they are "wicked" in their heart (9.4; 12.34-37; cf. 22.18; 23.25-36 and also 15.10-20). See Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (1988), 115.

[42] Mt 2.1-18 clearly shows this hypocrisy of King Herod who enquires of Jesus' birthplace with the intention to murder him. The Sermon on the Mount exposes this lack of integrity in action and motive behind the ostensible pieties: 5.21f,27f; 6.2-4,5-6,16-18. Cf. also 15.1-9; 23.16-22,25-28.

[43] Mt 15.1-9; 23.23-24.

[44] Mt 5.23f; 6.14f; 6.19-21; 6.25-34.

[45] Mt 21.28-32; 23.13,15. The scribes and Pharisees are also denounced as "blind guides" or "blind fools" in 15.10-14; 23.16,17,24 (cf. 23.26: "you blind Pharisee").

unwittingly, thus setting themselves against God.[46] So unlike the Jewish "sinners" living in immorality and openly revolting against God, the Jewish leaders are the personification of hypocrisy.[47]

In their response to Jesus' preaching, the first disciples appear as those who trust in Jesus (4.18-22; cf. 4.17). As a group, the disciples are portrayed as Jesus' faithful followers. Thus, juxtaposed alongside the hostility and opposition from Jewish authorities in 11.1-16.12, there is a parallel narration which depicts scenes of Jesus being accompanied by his disciples with a following of crowds attracted to his charismatic power.[48] In contrast to the unbelieving Jewish leaders, the

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[46] In their opposition to Jesus or his disciples, the Jewish leaders have actually misrepresented God in their discernment of the divine will (12.1-45; 15.1-19; 16.1-4; 21.23-28; 22.15-33). In particular, in attributing demonic power to Jesus' exorcism, the Pharisees will incur divine judgment, as pronounced in Jesus' words: "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (12.28). Cf. also 21.28-32.

[47] For a discussion of hypocrisy in Matthew's Gospel, see David Rhoads, "The Gospel of Matthew: The Two Ways: Hypocrisy or Righteousness" (1992). Dan O. Via's reading of hypocrisy in Matthew's Gospel ("The Gospel of Matthew: Hypocrisy as Self-Deception" [1988]) as simply "self-deception" is reductionist.

[48] The story-line in this narrative section follows the general pattern:

Hostility	*Withdrawal*	*Following*	*Jesus' Power*
12.1-14	12.15a	12.15b	12.15c,22f
13.53-14.12	14.13a	14.13b	14.14-35
15.1-20	15.21	(cf.15.23b)	15.22-39
16.1-4a	16.4b	16.5	----

The depiction of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in Mt 12 introduces the pattern of hostility-withdrawal-following-manifestation of power. We have omitted the parable discourse in this sketch. See also D.J. Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader" (1992).

disciples are faithful followers.

Yet, as we have seen in chapter 6,[49] the faith of the disciples is portrayed as "little faith;" their trust on Jesus flounders in times of danger or want.[50] They also lack perception, requiring explanation from Jesus for his parabolic teaching.[51] Their most prominent failure is, however, portrayed in the three narrative cycles of passion/resurrection predictions (in 16.13-20.28): in their response to Jesus' words on his suffering and death, the disciples reveal a disposition of self-seeking and a frame of mind which aspires for honour and power. Peter's words are representative: "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (19.27, NRSV).[52]

Thus, in stark contrast to the "Jewish leaders" and the "sinners," the gospel narrative does not portray moral failure in the disciples. Instead, they are portrayed as stumbling in other central aspects of discipleship:they fail to understand Jesus' teaching, and lack whole-hearted faith. But most importantly, the disciples are portrayed as setting their minds on "things of the world," rather than on "things of God" (16.23c). The "sin" in question

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[49] See the section on "Humility and the Portrayal of the Disciples" in the literary reading of Mt 18.1-4.

[50] Mt 8.23-27; 14.22-33; 16.5-12; 17.14-20; cf. 6.25-33.

[51] Mt 13.36; 15.15; 16.5-12.

[52] The events subsequent to the community discourse also portray Jesus correcting his disciples' evaluative point of view: 19.3-12,13-15; 19.16-20.16; cf. also 23.8-12.

therefore points to a lifestyle which is excessively concerned with the things of the world to the neglect of the righteousness of God. It is a life perceptible to other disciples which is drifting away from the discipleship of self-denial, non-condemning attitude, and service,[53] towards a life of self-centeredness and increasing worldliness. This interpretation is supported by the picture of a straying sheep in 18.10-14.

This reading is further reinforced by the scenario of the erring disciple's refusal to accept the counsel of the entire community. The "obduracy" suggests not moral depravity but rather disagreement over the "correct" understanding of Jesus' teaching. This is consistent with another narrative portrayal of the disciples, namely, their incomprehension of Jesus' words and intention. With his own interpretation of Jesus' teaching, the "unrepentant" disciple is unconvinced that his way of life is in violation of God's will and hence sinful, and therefore refuses to accept the judgment of the community.[54]

In this regard the disciple who stands under the judgment of the community is like the hypocritical "scribes and Pharisees." The "hypocrisy" here is, however, not the result of inner motivation, limited commitment to the will of God, or separating relationship with God from

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[53] See ch. 6 for the explication of "humility" in Mt 18.1-4.

[54] So also Mark Powell, *God with Us* (1995), 87-88, in his reading of Mt 18.15-17.

relationship with people.[55] The hypocrisy involved is that of a self-deception: insisting on his "righteousness," the straying disciple is blind to his way of life which is departing from Jesus' teaching and from God's will. In fact, in 7.1-5 the epithet of "hypocrisy" is applied to Jesus' own disciples to warn them of living a life which is blind to one's own flaws. In this regard the reader has already been warned against seeking things of the world, and the impossibility of serving both God and mammon (6.19-24).[56]

Sinfulness for Jesus' disciples therefore has a larger meaning: it obviously includes blatant immoral/ity, but it is primarily a way of life not lived in accordance with Jesus' teaching. An aspect of this sinfulness is indeed indicated in Jesus' earlier warning (18.5-9) against disciples who withhold assistance for those who are in need.[57] Their inaction reveals a coldness of heart which arises from a mind and a way of living which are oriented to the world (cf. 6.19-24).

This understanding is corroborated by the parable of the sower with its interpretation in 13.3-8,18-23. While the parable sets out the various causes for the scarcity of genuine response in Israel to Jesus' preaching in the gospel story (cf. 11.16-24), it also describes for the

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[55] That is, the first three categories of hypocrisy as discussed above.

[56] Cf. also Mt 16.23f; 20.25-28; 23.8-12.

[57] See discussions of Mt 18.5-9 in ch. 8.

reader a similar reality facing the post-Easter Christian community. In particular, the parable envisions a state of affairs within the community where there are Christians who do not "bear fruit" because of their orienting their lives to "the care of the world and the pleasure of wealth" (13.22). The parable thus affirms the above interpretation that a disciple's straying into sin in the community discourse is the straying into a life preoccupied with this present world. The parable does not indicate the fate of such disciples, but in 18.10-14 it becomes clear that the straying disciple, if continuing to deviate off the course of discipleship, is destined for eternal destruction.

Therefore, consistent with the theme of seeking a wayward disciple (in 18.10-14), to "gain" (κέρδαινειν) a brother (18.15) has the corresponding sense of bringing him/her to "safety" so that he/she would not perish (18.14). The verb, therefore, has a soteriological connotation - "you have saved your brother."[58]

Thus, although the "unrepentant" disciple in 18.15a does not live the obviously immoral life of "sinners" he/she is nevertheless described as like ὁ ἐθνικός καὶ ὁ τελώνης. This is because in living a life oriented to the "things of the world," the disciple is not unlike a gentile who does not know the will of God or a toll-collector who in pursuit of the pleasures of the world has chosen to

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[58] V. Pfitzner 1982:38. Since Mt 18.15-20 is not about personal offences, "gaining" a brother does not mean reconciliation, as taken by some exegetes (e.g. Davies and Allison 1991:783; L. Morris 1992:467; Garland 1993:191).

ignore or even reject God's rule over him.

As in the literary readings of 18.1-4 (in ch. 6), our reading of the "sinfulness" in 18.10-20 has demonstrated the central aspect of a close, literary reading. The meaning of "sinfulness" is construed from the narrative portrayal of the disciples in the Gospel, particularly, their "failures," as compared with the portrayal of the Jewish sinners and leaders. This is an Iserian reader-response reading which uses characterization of disciples as a means of filling in the narrative gap, here on the meaning of "sin" in 18.10-20.

2. *The Seeking of a Wayward Disciple*

On the meaning of the community pronouncement of 18.17 we shall see in the following pages that in reading vv 15-20 as an integral part of 18.10-20, v 17b ("let such a person be to you as a gentile and a toll-collector") may take on a plausible sense which differs from the common exegetical view that the community pronouncement conveys a sense of disciplinary action of "ostracism."[59]

In view of the way Jesus encourages constant petition for divine forgiveness (6.12), and the prominence in the gospel narrative of eschatological scenes of separation

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[59] See, e.g., Bornkamm (1970:39-46), Forkman (1972:128-32), J.A. Overman (1990:103-6), Patte (1987:253), Davies/Allison (1991:785-86), Hagner (1995:532), Harrington (1991:269). An exception is W.P. Thompson's interpretation which views Mt 18.17b as expressing "personal attitude and conduct rather than ecclesistical condemnation" (1970:185). A more plausible view is D.E. Garland's interpretation (1993:192) which embraces both "excommunication" and re-evangelization of the erring disciple.

among Jesus' disciples,[60] the exhortation not to despise but to save a straying "little one" therefore does not indicate that sin is an exception or an anomaly within the Christian community (cf. 18.7).[61] In fact, sinfulness is the inevitable state of affairs of the Christian community. What is perhaps extraordinary (to the reader) in 18.15-17 is the existence of circumstances in which some disciples refuse to submit to the community verdict over the "sinfulness" of their lives.

When this happens, the community verdict regarding the "impenitent" disciple is: "Let such a person be to you as a gentile and toll-collector" (18.17b). The pronouncement represents the community's collective evaluative judgment: the "unrepentant" disciple is judged to be living a life which has departed from Jesus' teaching, and thus is not much different from a gentile or a toll-collector.[62]

The pronouncement has also a performative force. The disciples in the narrative world had probably understood the collective proclamation to enjoin an ostracism - treating the unrepentant disciple as an "outsider" to be shunned like a gentile and a toll-collector. But as part of 18.10-20 whose dominant motif is "pastoral" seeking, it is also plausible to understand v 17b in a positive sense. Furthermore, Matthew's narrative does not seem to convey an

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[60] See the episodes in 7.21-23; 13.24-30,36-43,47-50; 22.1-13; 25.1-13,31-46.

[61] *Contra* E. Schweizer 1975:373.

[62] See the preceding interpretation of "sinfulness."

evaluative viewpoint that toll-collectors (as representative of Jewish "sinners") are to be despised, nor does it imply an anti-gentile sentiment so that in likening the unrepentant disciple to a "gentile" the community pronouncement ostracizes the incalcitrant disciple.

We shall show below that the gospel narrative portrays a ministry of Jesus which is distinguished by his association with the weak and the despised in the Jewish society, and that it does not convey a negative evaluative point of view regarding the Jewish sinners and gentiles.

(1) Portrayed as part of Jesus' ministry, the scenes described in 9.9-13 show Jesus compassionately seeking the "sinners" of Israel. Through the claims of Jesus' opponents that he is "a friend of toll-collectors and sinners" (11.19), the narrative indicates indirectly that this association of Jesus with the "sinners" is the hallmark of his ministry. In fact, in a scriptural citation (12.18-21 citing Isa 42.1-4) the narrator conveys to the reader this aspect of Jesus' ministry as fulfilling the role of the "suffering servant" in the prophecy of Isaiah. In the light of the overview of Jesus' deeds depicted in Mt 8-9, the reader realizes that the "sinners," along with the sick, are the "bruised reed and smoldering wick" for which Jesus cared (12.20a).[63] To understand 18.17b in terms of ostracism is thus in sharp contrast to the narrative perspective regarding Jesus' association with (Jewish) "sinners."

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[63] See Davies/Allison 1991:326.

(2) In Matthew's story, gentiles are generally cast in a positive light: the gentile magi worship the infant Jesus (2.1-12), the centurion and the Canaanite woman have faith (8.5-13; 15.14-28),[64] and the wife of Pontius Pilate recognizes Jesus to be a "righteous man" (27.19). But even in those episodes in which gentiles are *unfavourably* portrayed, no anti-gentile sentiment is implied in the narration.

Thus Pilate and especially the centurion with his soldiers are unfavourably depicted in the passion narrative.[65] Yet when compared with the Jewish leaders and the crowds in the passion narrative, even these gentiles appear as "better" characters. Pilate is not represented as exonerated from the responsibility for Jesus' death, even though he discerns that Jesus is innocent and intends to release him (27.18,20-24).[66] But the responsibility is never depicted as solely Pilate's. The Jewish leaders and the crowds are represented as equally responsible and share

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[64] In the context of Jesus' rejection by the ruling and religious authorities (12.1-16.12), Mt 15.24 ("I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel") does not convey an anti-gentile sentiment. In fact, in the broader context of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders, the episode of the Cannanite woman actually enhances the faith of the gentile.

[65] Cf. Mt 27.15-37,51-54. For the negative portrait of the gentile soldiers in the passion narrative, see David Sim's fine discussion, "The 'Confession' of the Soldiers in Matthew 27.54" (1993).

[66] See Timothy Cargal, "His Blood be Upon Us and Upon our Children: A Matthean Double Entendre?" (1991), 107-8,111.

with Pilate the blame for the crucifi X -ion of Jesus.[67]

In the case of the centurion and his soldiers, these gentiles were depicted in dark colours in their brutality. But in the end, they are shown to have the sense to perceive and admit their guilt when faced with the divine epiphany (27.54).[68] In this regard these gentile soldiers appear in a "better" light in comparison with the Jewish leaders who, in their obduracy of unbelief, plotted to obstruct faith in Jesus among the Jews by bribing those soldiers who watched over Jesus' tomb (28.11-15).

Another episode in which gentiles appear to be portrayed somewhat negatively is Jesus' exorcism in the territories of Gadarenes described in 8.28-34. The Gadarenes recognized Jesus' charismatic power but pleaded for his departure, apparently fearful that his presence might cause further destruction to their resources of livelihood (cf. 8.31f). However, as part of the picture of Jesus' ministry in Mt 8-9, the episode is depicted as a sequel to the "boat incident" and gives an answer, albeit in the mouth of the demons, to the disciples' question

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[67] See Mt 26.63-68. 27.1-2,20-25; cf. also 26.20-25. See Timothy Cargal 1991:106-8.

[68] David Sim (1993) offers a persuasive account of refutation of the common view that the soldiers' "confession" is a (Christian) confession of faith in Jesus (e.g. Meier 1979:205; Senior 1975:323-38; Kingsbury 1988:89-90; J.P. Heil 1991:87-88). See also N.R. Petersen (1992:941) who also understands that the centurion's acclamation in Mark (15.39) "is at best ironically right, because he does not know about Jesus' passion predictions and the necessity for Jesus to raise from the dead, an event that had yet to occur at the time of his 'confession'."

about Jesus' person (8.27,29). In other words, the event is centred on Jesus' person and his power; the narrative does not convey any anti-gentile attitudes. The request for Jesus to leave is not so much an outright rejection of Jesus, in contradistinction to the hostile attitudes of the Jewish leaders, as concern for their properties.[69]

Finally, in 5.47, 6.7-8,31-32, there are disparaging remarks about behaviour and religious practices common in the gentile world. On 6.7-8 it is to be noted that the negative remarks on the prayers of gentiles are juxtaposed with Jesus' denunciation of prayers of the "hypocrites," the Jewish leaders (6.5-7). These statments and similar remarks on the toll-collectors (5.46) should be recognized as registering disapproval; Jesus' words turn the Jewish sinners and gentiles into a *stereotype*, people who are ignorant of God's will. They must not be confused with conveying of a hostile attitude towards Jewish "sinners" or gentiles per se, or conveying personal avoidance of these individuals.[70]

(3) Moreover, gentile inclusion in divine salvation is

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[69] In his essay, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles" (1995), David Sim has not paid sufficient attention to the contrasting portrayal of the gentile figures with the Jewish leaders in the same segment of narration or in the Gospel as a whole. His reading (see esp. pp. 23-25) of the gentiles in Matthew is therefore misguided by a lack of sensitivity to the narrative movement in the relevant section of the Gospel.

[70] *Contra* David Sim 1995:28-30.

hinted at repeatedly.[71] In Matthew's "genealogy," Rahab and Ruth, through their faith, fulfill the inclusive, universalist promise of Abraham (Gen 12.3).[72] In Jesus' great commission (28.16-20), it becomes clear that gentiles (along with the Jews) are the object of "disciple-making." This narrative point of view thus nullifies any false impression that gentiles are stereotypical figures to be despised and avoided.[73]

(4) An understanding of 18.17b as referring to "excommunication" goes against the parable of the tares (13.24-30,36-43) which teaches the reader that the Christian community is not to effect a separation within it of the "sons of the evil one" from the "sons of the kingdom;" such separation will occur only at the end time and be carried out by angelic agents. Other scenes of

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[71] Cf. Mt 8.5-12; 22.1-14. The salvation of gentiles becomes clearer in the narrative voice in 12.18d, 21 which indicates the significance of Jesus' mission ("he shall proclaim justice to the gentiles" and "in his name will the gentiles hope").

[72] See J.P. Heil, "The Narrative Role of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy" (1991), and esp. John Nolland, "The Four (Five) Women and Other Annotations in Matthew's Genealogy" (1997).

[73] It needs to be stressed that in the mission discourse, gentile persecutions of Jesus' disciples is not singled out, but juxtaposed with the Jewish persecutions (10.17-18; cf. 24.9-14). Furthermore, the theme underlying 10.16-23 is that mission will inevitably entail persecution and the disciples are instructed in how to respond to them (D.J. Weaver 1990:90-102). The implication is that the gentile world is not a friendly world as far as its response to the disciples' preaching is concerned. With the gentile mission in view, 10.18 does not encourage any ill-feeling towards the gentiles because of their hostile reaction to Jesus' disciples among them. David Sim has failed to recognize the narrative thrust of 10.16-23 in his (1995) discussion of the gentiles in Matthew's Gospel.

separation in the Gospel are notably eschatological as well.[74]

In the light of the above discussion, the interpretation of 18.17b as a sanction to shun fellowship with the recalcitrant disciple because he/she has become like a gentile and a toll-collector is not harmonious with (i) Jesus' distinctive ministry in his association with "sinners," (ii) his teaching in other discourses, and (iii) the narrative perspective which does not imply a hostile attitude and sentiment towards Jewish sinners and gentiles. In fact, the texts examined above indicate that "sinners" are those who are the special subject of Jesus' seeking and that gentiles, because of their ignorance of the will of God, are in need of divine mercy. The portrayal of sinners and gentiles in the gospel story therefore suggests a positive understanding of the community pronouncement in 18.17b.[75]

The pronouncement to regard the unrepentant disciple as a gentile and a toll-collector carries a sense of grief rather than a triumphant condemnation, for he/she is seen to be continuing on the way to perdi-tion (18.14). Because

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[74] Cf. Mt 13.47-50; 22.1-13; 25.31-46.

[75] For a similar reading in which the entire work of Matthew's Gospel is made the dominant context for interpreting any part of it, see M.A. Powell's (1995) narrative reading of Mt 23.1-7. On the basis of the uniformly negative portrayal of the scribes and Pharisees throughout the Gospel, Powell rightly understands, against the common view, that the Matthean passage does not assent to the authority of the scribes and Pharisees to teach, but only states the fact that because of their sole access to the Torah, they are in a position to tell others what Moses said.

the straying disciple is not repudiating Jesus and his teaching, but was "blinded" by his/her mistaken interpretation of Jesus' teaching in living a sinful life, he/she needs to be taught about Jesus' words once again. The pronouncement therefore expresses positively the exhortation to "reeducate" the straying disciple who is now like a gentile and a toll-collector on the way to destruction. The exhortation engenders a "mission" which amounts to a re-making of discipleship.[76]

Therefore, instead of understanding 18.17b as pronouncing the erring disciple to be an "outsider," the words are more plausibly understood as in effect a plea for further attempts to save the disciple.[77] The singular "you" (σοι) in 18.17b emphasizes the personal approach to the erring disciple: the disciple who first perceived the straying one (18.15) is encouraged to take up further responsibility to "re-disciple" the wayward disciple.[78]

3. *The Community Authority and the "Presence" of Jesus*

The community pronouncement in 18.17b further implies that an individual disciple's interpretation of Jesus'

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[76] See Mark Powell for a similar reading (1995a:87), although he does not elaborate on 18.15-17 in relation to the narrative perspective regarding gentiles and Jewish "sinners".

[77] Along similar line of interpretation of 18.17b, see Stephen Hobhouse 1937.

[78] Though in their readings both understand the community pronouncement to mean breaking of brotherly fellowship, Garland (1993:192) and M. Davies (1993:129) recognize that the break is not complete - the new situation implies that the "straying sheep" becomes the person to whom the community's mission must be directed. See also Hare 1993:214.

teachings is subordinate to that of the entire community, in particular, regarding Jesus' words on the conduct of life. When the disciple concerned rejects the charge by other disciples that his way of life is sinful, the issue is to be settled not by those engaged in teaching alone,[79] but by the community as a whole. And the community judgment of what is sinful or not[80] has the divine sanction behind it.[81] The authority of the community's verdict is, however, based upon its corporate communion with the risen Jesus

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[79] That there are disciples in the post-Easter Christian community who are engaged in teaching is fairly evident in Mt 5.19. In addressing the reader, Jesus says: "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." See also 13.52 and 23.8-10,34. All these passages strongly imply a "teaching" role, esp. suggested by the author's use of the word "scribe(s)" in the last two passages cited.

[80] In the context of the community discourse, the Jewish expression of "binding and loosing" denotes the exercise of authority and power. See J.A. Overman's citations (1990:105-6) of Josephus, *Jewish War* (1.5.1-3) and *Jewish Antiquity* 13.16.2 about the political and juridical authority of the Pharisees to banish and to recall, to imprison and to release. See also Derrett 1983; Hiers 1985. (See the survey of interpretations of Mt 16.19; 18.18; Jn 20.23 by D.C. Duling 1987). In view of the above discussion, the phrase does not convey a sense of retention or forgiveness of sins (so Thompson 1970:202; Beare 1981:380; Gundry 1982:269; Basser 1985; Bruner 1990:651-52), or excommunication (Patte 1987:254; cf. Hill 1972:276). Consistent with our preceding interpretation, the phrase here has the (Jewish) sense of "permitting" and "forbidding" conducts according to the interpretation of Torah (hence sinful or not sinful). Here, the judgment is based on Jesus' teaching, so Bornkamm 1970:40-41; Davies/ Allison 1991:787.

[81] Against Thompson 1970:202, and *with* Gundry (1982:368), and Davies and Allison (1991:787), we take 18.18 to connect with v 17 and not apply to individual actions indicated in vv 15,16: the plural δήσητε, λύσητε refers to the entire body of disciples.

(18.20).[82] This presence of the exalted Jesus is conditional upon the disciples' gathering as a community confessing Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and committed to living a life in accordance with his teaching (18.19).[83] In such gatherings committed to seeking God's will, the risen Jesus will be present among the assembled disciples and guide them to the divine will concerning the moral issue they are praying for. Thus the consensus verdict reached is what has been revealed from heaven through the community's corporate communion with its risen Lord.[84]

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[82] As they stand, Mt 18.19-20 are thematically connected with 18.18, clarifying the ground for the authority of the community judgment (in 18.18), so Davies/Allison 1991:788. See the same pattern of "amen I tell you" followed by "again (amen) I tell you" in 19.23-24, the latter verse reinforcing the former. Derrett's thesis (1979) that these two verses are about the arbitration by Christians representing two individual Christians (or parties) involved in legal or financial dispute, while plausible in itself, does not do justice to the context within which the passage is placed (18.10-20), which is the seeking of a straying disciple.

[83] On the basis of Rev 16.14 and 20.7-8 (cf. 19.19), Thompson (1970:197-98) understands εἰς τὸ ἐμον ὄνομα in Mt 18.20 as expressing the purpose of Christian gathering: "gather together to invoke the name of Jesus" (198). However, in view of the distinction of usage between εἰς and ἐν in Matthew, baptism in 28.18 may indicate the purpose use of εἰς - consistent with what discipleship involves, baptism being symbolic act declaring submission to the triune lordship of God (Carson 1984:597) - and thus points to the direction for understanding 18.20, without recourse to the texts of Revelation as Thompson has proposed. Furthermore, Thompson's suggestion ("to invoke the name of Jesus") needs to be understood in the light of Peter's confession in 16.16, that is, in terms of the community's belief and faith in Jesus.

[84] The periphrastic future perfect construction of "binding" and "loosing" in 18.18 simply refers to the *expectation* of the *state* of the unrepentant disciple in the sight of God. For recent criticism of the traditional view

The community judgment, however, should not be in conflict with Jesus' teaching as passed on by his earlier disciples (28.19-20), who shared with Peter the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," the teaching authority expressed in the same phrase of binding and loosing (16.19).[85] The unanimity ensures that the community decision has the divine sanction behind it. It is significant that the discourse does not envisage a situation in which consensus has not been reached. For the narrator (and the reader as well), it appears that such disunity is inconceivable when the risen Jesus is in the midst of the disciples who in submission to the lordship of Jesus gather to seek God's will.

In its relationship with 16.18, the community's moral authority is best understood, not so much as a transference[86] to it of the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," as the *realization* of that authority which was bestowed symbolically in Peter, the representative of the body of Jesus' disciples. This authority is mediated to the community as a whole through its corporate communion with the risen Jesus when the community gathers together to seek divine guidance on moral issues.

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of temporal scheme of Greek future (future implication) and perfect tense (continuing result of a past action), see Stanley Porter 1988 (esp. 157-62), 1989 (chs. 5,9,10).

[85] We concur with Bornkamm 1970:40-41 that in 16.19 the emphasis is on the teaching authority of Peter, although it carries moral implications as well. See also Davies and Allison 1991:638-39.

[86] So, e.g., Schweizer 1975:371-72, Kingsbury 1979:75-76,80; Beare 1981:380; Bruner 1990:651, Hare 1993:214-15.

If the disciples in the narrative had difficulty in understanding the paradoxical "presence" of Jesus in his absence, the reader has also to come to grips with this experiencing of Jesus in his absence. The presence motif (18.20) thus presents the reader with a textual indeterminacy, similar to that in 18.5 on receiving Jesus. We have seen in chapter 7 that in 18.5 and 25.31-46, this "presence" of Jesus in his absence is implied: by living "in" Jesus' words there is a constant experiential encounter with the risen Jesus in a disciple's life. And to "receive" a disciple in obedience to Jesus' teaching is therefore tantamount to receiving Jesus himself.

The present motif in 18.20 presents another scenario of encounter with the risen Jesus. Before his return in glory,[87] the experiential encounter with Jesus is effected through his teachings - in reading and reflecting upon his words. This reading is indeed reinforced by two familiar narrative features of the Gospel, which we shall consider briefly in the following paragraphs.

(1) In the narrative the disciples always address Jesus as "Lord" (κύριε).[88] In the reading or hearing of the gospel story, the address thus helps facilitate a

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[87] The scene of transfiguration in 17.1-8 represents an anticipatory, partial, manifestation of Jesus in his glory (cf. 24.29-31; 25.31).

[88] See the disciples' address in 8.21,25; 14.28,30; 16.22; 17.4; 18.21; 26.22; cf. also 7.21, except for Judas who addresses Jesus as ῥαββί (26.25, 49). In contrast, opponents or uncommitted person (non-disciple) always address Jesus as "teacher" (διδάσκαλε): 12.38; 19.16; 22.16,24,36 (cf. 8.19).

reader's particip-ation in the story and thus creates through the narrative a means to experience the presence and power of Jesus.

(2) As we have seen, in the major discourses Jesus is often portrayed as speaking past the character (disciples) to the reader, addressing situations which are relevant to post-Easter Christian community. In the words of the pre-Easter Jesus, the later disciples encounter the risen Jesus. The grouping of Jesus' words into discourses set in the context of a narrative thus functions as an efficient means for his disciples to experience the nearness of the risen Jesus.

Thus, in the particular gatherings for deciding the moral issues with regard to a disciple's conduct of life, the presence of the risen Jesus is encountered in the corporate reading and meditation of Jesus' words in pursuit of God's will (18.20). In reading and reflecting on the words of Jesus in relation to one's way of life, Jesus' disciples would be experiencing the "presence" of Jesus in the community gathering. It is this communion with Jesus which gives divine sanction on the community judgment about moral issues.

4. *From the Narrative World to the Real World: Message to the Reader*

The concern for the spirituality of individuals in the Christian community and the concerted effort to restore erring disciples to the life of discipleship expresses a religious outlook and conviction of the gospel author which shape the *plot* of his story of Jesus and the portrayal of

the various characters in it. As we noted in chapter 2, the overall plot of Matthew's story is: in failing to subvert Jesus from the course of his mission, the Devil continues to attempt to thwart God's salvific purpose by leading his disciples astray through vain glory, worries and pleasures of the world. This demonic force, envisaged in 16.18 (the "gates of Hades"), is seen already at work attacking the community of disciples. With this whole picture of the gospel story in view, the reader comes to realize that behind a disciple's straying into a sinful life of worldliness is the Devil's subversive activity to lead Jesus' disciple into perdition. A disciple's sin thus acquires a cosmic dimension; his/her spiritual welfare is closely linked with the activity of the Devil.

Hence, while a Christian may not be exonerated from the responsibility of living a sinful life, Satan's deception and temptation may foster the thoughts and motives in a disciple, and eventually bring his/her inner state of mind into outward expressions in everyday life. For the reader, the call to restore a brother who has gone astray (18.15) is therefore a call to stand on God's side to combat Satan's pervasive influence. And in this connection the reader recalls the petition in the Lord's Prayer to God for deliverance from the Evil One (6.13).

IV. Concluding Remarks

(1) First, a few observations regarding the reading strategy on this part of the community discourse. As with

comprehension of earlier parts of the discourse, our reading of 18,10-20 involves extensive interaction with the rest of Matthew's narrative. We think that the overall comprehension of vv 10-20 depends on the perception of the meaning of "sinfulness," the community pronouncement, and the "presence" of the risen Jesus. We find that the portrayal of Jesus and the disciples, the first two parables of the parable discourse, the "dual audience" of the discourses, and the narrative feature of the disciples addressing Jesus as "Lord" are all relevant to the "filling in" of the narrative gap in order to understand these verses. In this section of the discourse, almost the entire gospel story is used to bridge the narrative gap. The meaning of the text emerges when "links" have been perceived in joining the discourse with other parts of the gospel narrative.

The plot of Matthew's story provides a framework for perceiving the significance (for modern readers) of 18.10-20 in connecting the narrative world to the real world of the (modern) disciple-reader. To seek and to restore an erring disciple is to engage in cosmic warfare with God against Satan who continues to subvert the community of Jesus' disciples.

(2) This passage further explicates the meaning of humility. It is a disposition which does not despise those who have gone astray, an attitude not of self-complacency but of concern for the spiritual well-being of wayward disciples.

(3) In the light of the characterization of the disciples, the discourse conveys a "comprehensive" meaning of "sin" for Jesus' followers: it is a way of life which shows no signs of God's rule over oneself, as revealed in one's actions and aspirations of life that deviate from Jesus' teaching.

(4) A "soteriology" then emerges from 18.10-20. Implicit in the seeking motif is the warning that a disciple may "forfeit" his/her salvation through living a sinful life,[89] which he/she may not even be aware of because of his/her miscomprehending of Jesus' teaching. So if a disciple "perseveres" in God's grace, it is through the *corporate* effort of preservation. Yet, if the disciple perishes, he/she perishes in his/her own doing. Thus, salvation of individuals also possesses a communal dimension.

(5) Our reading of this part of the discourse provides insights into the meaning of community life of Jesus' disciples. Just as the disciples are portrayed as a group as well as in the person of Peter (and to a lesser extent in the two brothers of Zebedee), so the essence of Christian community life consists of two dimensions: communality and individuality.

(i) Communality is exhibited in the care for the spiritual well-being of its members; each disciple has the "obligation" to care for the spiritual pilgrimage of other

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[89] This theme is already present in the "entrance" saying in 18.1-4. See further vv 21-35 and the discussion of this final part of the discourse in the next chapter.

disciples. The efforts to restore any wayward disciple persist so long as the disciple does not repudiate his/her faith in Jesus. This implies that there would be little room for "private morality" and "individualism" in the community of faith.

(ii) Seeking wayward disciples begins with personal persuasions, but when counsel is rejected, it is the entire body of disciples which judges whether the disciple is actually living a life which deviates from Jesus' teaching. While there are disciples engaged in teaching, the ultimate interpretation of Jesus' teaching and moral judgment rests with the whole community.

A REDACTION-CRITICAL READING

We shall now look at the passage from a redaction-critical perspective. As redaction-criticism is oriented towards the evangelist's intention, a comparative study of Matthew's use and alterations of his sources, and his overall redactional composition of 18.10-20 may indicate the extent to which our preceding literary reading accords with the author's intention.

I. Synoptic Comparisons

As we have seen, Markan material is the primary source behind 18.1-9. In the next pericope Matthew has made use of non-Markan sources. Our passage bears a moderate resemblance to the Lukan parallels in two places:

Mt 18.10-14	Lk 15.1-7
18.15a	17.3-4
18.15b-20.	------

Luke's parable is set in a polemical context in which Jesus justifies his association with the "sinners" (15.1-3), and there are differences in details between the two synoptic versions as well. Mt 18.15 resembles merely the first part of Lk 17.3 ("If your brother sins, rebuke him"). And about half of the sayings in Mt 18.10-20 find no parallel in other synoptic gospels.

Though absolute certainty is not possible, source-critically we have the following plausible picture of Matthean composition:

Verses 10,14: Matthew's editorial introduction and conclusion to the parable.[90]

Verses 12-13: a parable based on some independent oral traditions or adapted from the Q-sayings (cf. Lk 15.4-6).[91]

Verses 15-17: sayings from Matthew's special material.

Verse 18: Redactional variation of Mt 16.19.

Verses 19-20: sayings from Matthew's special material.

Exactly as he does elsewhere, the evangelist has pulled out relevant material from sources available to him, reformulated and reordered them, and introduced an editorial framework and linked words or phrases to mould the disparate tradition of Jesus' sayings into a thematic flow of speech.

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[90] In Mt 18.10, ὁρᾶτε μή, πρόσωπον (of God), ἐν οὐρανοῖς, πατήρ + ἐν (τοῖς) οὐρανοῖς are characteristic of Matthew. On 18.10b see discussion below. Note the Matthean diction in 18.14: οὕτως, ἔμπροσθεν, πατὴρ ὑμῶν/μου, θελήμα + πατήρ, πατὴρ ὁ ἐν (τοῖς) οὐραν ν.

[91] See discussion below.

Apart from the Lukan parallel, the parable of the lost sheep is also found in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (logion 107). Whatever the sources behind the Thomas Gospel, and the "sheep" parable in particular,[92] the parable in Matthew's Gospel is more closely related to the Lukan parable than to the version in Thomas.

(1) As in Luke's version, Matthew relates, albeit in different terms, the "place" in which the ninety-nine sheep are left, a detail not present in the Coptic parable.[93] (2) Absent also in Thomas is the element of joy, at least in the form presented in the synoptic versions.[94] (3) On the other hand, Thomas tells of a story of a "shepherd" who lost a sheep while both Matthew and Luke simply state that a "man" lost one of his sheep.

(4) Furthermore, the lost sheep in Thomas is described as the "largest." The phrase "it was the largest" probably represents a gnostic gloss[95] expressing an élite sentiment

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[92] On recent survey of scholarly discussions of the Gospel of Thomas' *dependence or independence of the cannonical Gospels*, see G.J. Riley, "The Gospel of Thomas in Recent Scholarship" (1994), 232-36.

[93] Mt 18.12: ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη, cf. Lk 15.4: ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.

[94] The Gospel of Thomas has: "After he had exerted himself, he said to the sheep, I love you more than the ninety-nine." This is not the same as Luke's depiction of the man carrying the lost sheep on his shoulder to express his joy (Lk 15.5), nor the simplier version in Matthew (18.13): "... he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray." Both synoptic versions are united by the verb expressing joy, χαίρειν.

[95] Logion 8 of Thomas' Gospel also tells a story similar to Matthew's parable of the net (13.47-50). Apart from the absence of "interpretation" as found in Matthew, this Thomas version differs again from Matthew's by the motif of largeness: the wise fishermen selects the "large"

of the gnostic Christians[96] - as a minority group in the world the gnostic believers see themselves as of "divine origin" having strayed from the "kingdom."[97]

In its present form, the parable in Thomas is therefore unlikely to represent the *form* of the source that underlines the Matthean parable, which is closer to the Lukan version. We shall show shortly that a more probable

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fish from his catch. W.L. Petersen's contention (1981:133-35) that the reference to "the largest" (in the "sheep" parable) is a covenant description of Israel (as the lost sheep) is forced. Israel's election is explicitly said not to be because of her (initial) greatness among the nations; in fact she was "the fewest of all peoples" (Dt 7.7). Moreover, Israel's later "greatness" is not of her own, but is the promises of God: she will become a people immeasurable as stars and dust (Gen 12.1f; 22.17; 26.4; 28.14). See also G.N. Stanton, *Gospel Truth? New Light on Jesus and the Gospels* (1995), 90.

[96] The gnostics are described as "solitary;" cf. logion 4,16,23,49,75. We consider the Gospel of Thomas in its present form a "gnostic" writing which embraces different perceptions of the world, humanity, Jesus, and salvation. Where logions in Thomas resemble the synoptic sayings, they receive a gnosticising twist. See, e.g., logion 3 in which the notion of "poverty" and "knowing oneself" are attached to sayings that have a parallel in Lk 17.20f (cf. also logion 54 = Lk 6.20/Mt 5.3); see also logion 13 cf. Mt 16.13-16/Mk 8.27-29/Lk 9.18-20; logion 22 cf. Mk 10.15; Mt 18.2-3. On scholarly discussions of the theological character of the Gospel of Thomas, see, in addition to Riley 1994, F.T. Fallon and R. Cameron's 1988 lengthy survey article of the *Thomas* scholarship.

The Gospel of Truth also contains a similar parable of lost sheep (J.M. Robinson (ed), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, [1988], 46). On the basis of the content of this coptic parable, and considerations of the date of origin of the work and its conceptual affinities to the Valentinian strand of gnosticism (see "introduction" to the text in Robinson 1988:38-39), the parable in this (coptic) gnostic text is also not relevant as a source for the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew.

[97] The parable of the lost sheep in Thomas begins: "The kingdom is like a shepherd ..." On the divine origin of the gnostic Christians, see logions 24,29,49,50,83,84 (cf. logion 3).

scenario is that the synoptic versions represent variations of the parable in the synoptic sayings source (Q), and that Luke's version is closer to the Q-parable. And the agreements between Matthew and Luke against Thomas suggest that the Q-parable is most probably independent of the Coptic parable.

While the synoptic versions are closer in form, there are differences. In addition to the different redactional setting, the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew differs from that in Lk 15 in the following respects: (1) There is substantial verbal deviation between the two versions of the parable.[98] (2) Whereas in Matthew there is a sense of uncertainty about finding the lost sheep (καὶ ἐὰν γένηται, 18.3), Luke depicts the man finding the lost sheep (Καὶ εὑρὼν ἐπιτίθησιν ἐπὶ τοὺς ὤμους αὐτοῦ, 15.5).[99] (3) In comparison with Luke's picture of the owner's great joy in finding the lost sheep, the description of joy in Matthew is more subdued.

Despite these differences, there are nevertheless similarities. Both Matthew and Luke have a common nucleus: loss of a sheep from a flock of hundred, the owner went seeking (leaving the ninety-nine), and joy upon finding. And amid the verbal disagreements there is present in the two parables a core of verbatim agreements:

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[98] The verbal differences cover the description of the man's possession of sheep, the lost sheep, the place where the ninety-nine sheep are left, the owner leaving (for the search) and seeking the sheep.

[99] Cf. also the owner's search phrased in Lk 15.4: "... and go after the one which is lost until he finds it."

ἄνθρωπος, ἑκατὸν πρόβατα, ἓν ἐξ αὐτῶν, τὰ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα, πορεύθεὶς/πορεύεται,[100] εὑρεῖν/εὑρών, χαρρει/χαίρων.
This common vocabulary reflects use of a common source for the core of the story.

In our view, where the sources of Matthew's material can be reasonably ascertained, a diachronic analysis may at least provide an indication as to how two disparate pieces of sayings traditions, 18.12-13 and 15-17, are related to form a meaningful text. As we shall show below, on the basis of the Q-origin of the parable (which we shall argue to be preserved more faithfully in the Lukan version), Matthew's difference in tone from the Lukan parable, namely, the uncertainty in finding the lost sheep, is intimately related to the composition and the sequential arrangement of 18.10-14 and 15-17.

Two interpretations of the relationship between these two synoptic parables are possible: (1) the two versions originated from *independent* sources[101] - the Matthean and Lukan special materials (M, L);[102] (2) a *common* written source behind the synoptic parables, namely, the sayings-

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[100] Και πορευθεις in Mt 18.12 is absent in ℵ W 078 f^1 et al; and καὶ πορεύεται ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπολωλός in Lk 15.4 has a variant reading in D: ἀπελθών τὸ ἀπολωλὸς ζητεῖ.

[101] E.g. Allen 1902: xliii, Marshall 1978:600; cf. M'Neile 1915:265.

[102] E.g. T.W. Manson 1949:283, W.R. Farmer 1961-62, J. Jeremias 1971.

source (Q).[103]

II. Matthew's Transformation of His Source

We shall show presently that the latter explanation is more plausible. On the evidence of language and style, Luke's version can be shown to be closer to the parable preserved in Q; the differing features in the Matthean parable can be reasonably accounted for as resulting from the redaction of the evangelist.

We shall show that (1) the Lukan setting (15.1-3), (2) the conclusion to the parable (15.7) and (3) the source-critical relation between the sheep and coin parables in Lk 15.4-10 provide culmulative evidence to a common source (Q) behind the synoptic parables.

(1) In Lk 15.1-3 the vocabulary is typically Lukan.[104] On linguistic grounds, these verses are in all likelihood composed by Luke to supply a narrative framework for the parable.[105] The formulation of the setting is probably

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[103] Lambrecht 1981:37-42, Fitzmyer 1981:79-80; 1985:1073; Gundry 1982:2-3,364-66; Kloppenborg 1988:174; Harrington 1991:266 and apparently Davies/Allison 1988:118; 1991:774-75. For additional reference, see Kloppenborg 1988:174.

[104] *Pace* Farmer 1961-62:301-2. Verse 1: ἦσαν + pres. ptc. (periphrastic construction), ἐγγίζειν (in the narrative); Lukan exaggeration with πάντες ("all the toll-collectors and sinners"); v 2: προσδέχομαι; v 3: εἶπεν πρός + person(s) in accusative, εἶπεῖν + παραβολήν. Cf. Jeremias 1971:185-89; 1980:244-45; Nolland 1993:770. See further on the next note.

[105] The singular form παραβολή in Lk 15.3 is probably collective, the "sheep" parable being followed by two more parables (15.8-10,11-24). There is the similar collective usage of the Greek in Lk 5.36: two "parables" are actually told in 5.36-39.

modelled on Luke's own redaction of the Markan pericope on Levi the toll-collector (Mk 2.15-17) in Lk 5.29-32,[106] presumably inspired by the concluding verse on the repentant sinner (15.7).

(2) There are linguistic indications which suggest that the parable "ending" at Lk 15.7 is part of the original parable in Q. Apart from 15.7c ("who do not need repentance") which is probably redactional,[107] the rest of the verse shows no clear signs of Luke's redactional hand.[108] On the other hand, M. Black and J. Jeremias[109]

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[106] Cf. with Lk 5.30: διαγόγγυζω, συνεσθίω, οἱ φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς (in this order). See Jeremias 1971:186-87, 1980:243 (who changed from his earlier position that Lk 15.1-2 was pre-Lukan [1963:100 and n.42]). Jeremias' position is followed by Fitzmyer 1985:1072 and Marshall (but reservedly) 1978:598-99. Cf. also C.H. Giblin 1961:15-16.

[107] This is probably based on Lk 5.31. Μετανοία is apparently influenced by Lk 5.32 ("I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repent.") as well as by μετανοοῦντι in 15.7a.

[108] Λέγω ὑμῖν is not a Lukan vocabulary. The phrase occurs in Q-sayings and Markan parallel material: 6.27=Mt 5.39; 7.9=Mt 8.10; 7.26=Mt 11.9; 7.28=Mt 11.11; 9.27=Mt 16.28 (=Mk 9.1); 10.12=Mt 11.22; 10.24=Mt 13.17; 11.51=Mt 23.36; 12.22=Mt 24.47; 12.59=Mt 5.26; 13.35=Mt 23.39; 15.7 (cf. Mt 18.13); 22.18=Mt 26.29; 21.3=Mk 12.43; and in Lukan special material (L): 13.3,5; 14.24; 15.10; 16.19; 18.8; 19.40; 22.16; 22.37. Only in 7 instances does the phrase appear in Luke but not in parallel sayings in Matthew (11.9=Mt 7.7; 12.4-5=Mt 10.28; 12.8f=Mt 10.32f; 12.51=Mt 10.34; 13.27=Mt 7.23; 17.34f=Mt 24.40f; 19.26=Mt 13.12). And in these cases, it is not evident that Λέγω ὑμῖν are all Lukan insertion. Of the 6 amen-sayings in Luke, three are from L (4.24; 12.37; 23.43), and the other three have Matthean parallel (Lk 18.17 cf. Mt 18.3 and Mk 10.15; 18.29=Mt 19.29; 21.32=Mt 5.18).

Joy is a Lukan motif and found in tradition Luke appropriated for his Gospel; cf. χαρά in 1.14; 2.10; 8.13; 10.17; 24.41,52f; χαίρειν in 19.6. The joy motif in the twin parables and in the parable of the prodigal son in Lk 15 indicate that Lk 15.7 (and v 10 as well) is probably traditional. See further on next note.

have shown that the Aramaic underlying χαρά ἐπί ἑνὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ point to Lk 15.7 being pre-Lukan.

(3) In Luke the "sheep" parable is immediately followed by another similar parable of the lost coin, joined by the particle ἤ (15.8-10). In addition to the common theme of seeking and heavenly joy over a repentant sinner, the second parable bears a striking verbal similarity to the first. It therefore appears that the two parables were preserved as a pair in the same source.[110] The likelihood of its being part of Q is greatly enhanced by the observation that some Q traditions exhibit the same structure of two sets of sayings connected by the particle ἤ.[111]

Εν τῷ οὐρανῷ(οἷς) is not Lukan, occurring elsewhere in Lk 6.23; 10.20; 12.33 (all from Q); 18.22 (from Mk 10.21); only 19.38 (ἐν οὐρανῷ εἰρήνη) is peculiar to Luke, cf. Mk 11.9b-10; Mt 21.9.

[109] M. Black 1967:184, Jeremias 1980:247. Cf. Fitzmyer 1985:1077-78.

[110] The view of W.R. Farmer (1961-62) that Lk 15.1-32 (v.3 redactional) is a unified tradition in the form of Greek *chreiai* preserved in Luke's special source (L), with relatively little redaction, is unconvincing. Above all, sayings in 15.4-7,8-10 are not *chreiai*, but parables (παραβολή, cf. v.3), and vv 7,10 are interpretation of the parables. Furthermore the parable of the lost son does not illustrate the preceding sayings; it is an indictment against the Jewish leaders (represented by the "elder son") of their attitude to the "sinners" - in their self-righteousness they cannot perceive God's love for sinners (cf. Lk 18.9-14).

[111] Cf. Mt 7.3-5 = Lk 6.41-42 (A C D L W Θ $f^{1.13}$ et al); Mt 7.7-11 = Lk 11.9-13. There are other double sayings (without the connecting ἤ) in Q: Lk 9.57-60 (= Mt 8.19-22); Lk 10.13-15 (= 11.21-24); Lk 11.31-32 (= Mt 12.41-42); Lk 13.18-21 (= Mt 13.31-33). See also Lukan special material where two sayings are connected by ἤ: 13.1-5; Lk 14.28-33. On scholarly opinion on the parable of the coin, see reference cited in Kloppenborg 1988:176.

Considerations of the evidence from Matthew reinforce the probable common origin of the parable:

(1) An examination of *Q-parables* in Matthew and Luke indicates that, in spite of verbal variation, the Matthean and Lukan versions do reveal a basic agreement in the substance of story.[112]

(2) Although there are some Lukan redactional elements in 15.4-7,8-10, the language and style as a whole is not Lukan.[113] It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Luke's parable of the lost sheep preserves substantially the parable found in Q. In contrast there are indications in the Matthean parable that the evangelist has recast the parable from his source. The parable is introduced with a direct question, τί ὑμῖν δοκεῖ; (18.12a). The question is redactional.[114] And beginning with a question would have forced the evangelist to open the parable with a conditional statement (ἐὰν γένηται τινι ἀνθρώπῳ ἔχων ...,

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[112] See the parables of the accuser (5.25-26 = Lk 12.57-59), two builders (Mt 7.24-27 = Lk 6.47-49), the unclean spirits (Mt 12.43-45 = Lk 11.24-26), mustard seed and leaven (Mt 13.31-32,33 = Lk 13.18-19,20-21), the good and wicked servant (Mt 24.45-51 = Lk 12.42-46). The origin(s) and relation of the parables of the great supper (Mt 22.2-10 = Lk 14.16-21) and the talents (Mt 25.14-30 = Lk 19.11-28) are disputed.

[113] While W.R. Farmer (1961-62) and J. Jeremias (1971; 1980:245-46) favour that Lk 15 emanated from Luke's special material (L), their observations on the language of the twin-parable reveal a prevalence of non-Lukan vocabulary and style over the evangelist's own redactional activity.

[114] The question appears also as insertion in parallel Markan material: (1) 22.17 cf. Mk 12.14d; (2) 22.42 cf. Mk 12.35; (3) 26.66 cf. Mk 14.64b (φαίνεται). The same phrase of questioning is found in tradition proper to Matthew (17.25; 21.28).

18.12b), rather with than with a *direct* question, as in Lk 15.4 (τίς ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ὑμῶν ἔχων).

In contrast to the "ending" of the Lukan parable (15.7) which is relatively free from Luke's redactional hand, the vocabularies of the "conclusion" at Mt 18.14, as we have seen, are characteristic of the evangelist. While the will of God is implicit in the imagery of heavenly joy in the original parable, Matthew has probably composed 18.14 to emphasize the divine will that none of the "little ones" should perish.

A story is told for a different emphasis so is shaped accordingly. So it is probable that in retaining the notion of joyfulness (χαίρει) when the owner finds the strayed sheep (18.13), Matthew has removed the colourful details of joy (cf. Lk 15.5f) because he pictures an uncertainty in the success of the search (καὶ ἐὰν γένηται εὑρεῖν αὐτό).[115]

(3) The presence of the twin-parable of the lost sheep and coin in Q is able to account for the Matthean composition of 18.10b: "for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face my Father who is in heaven." On the probable ground that Matthew has recast the parable of the lost sheep, the second parable of the lost coin would not cohere well with the notion of "straying" and the

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[115] The appeal to the language of the Lukan parable being relatively smoother and polished than Matthew's (so Thompson 1970:169) does not lend decisive support to the view that Matthew's version of parable is more primitive than Luke's.

following picture of a disciple's sinning (v 15).[116] Matthew, however, did not simply drop the parable of the lost coin, but transformed it into a brief statement to give the reason for not despising one's fellow disciple.[117] The imagery of the disciples' angels and their having unrestricted access to the divine presence in Mt 18.10 are probably inspired by Lk 15.10, which describes the rejoi‿cing of the *angels* of God. The angelic joy in the parable of lost coin is turned into the angelic intercessing for those who have gone astray (cf. 6.13). In his free composition, Matthew has shifted the focus from Jesus' mercy to "lost sinners" to Jesus' "little ones" who have gone astray.[118]

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[116] Cf. C.H. Gib lin, "Structural and Theological Considerations on Lk 15" (1962), 20.

[117] In his use and interpretation of sources, Matthew has revealed his freedom in shaping the tradition. G.N. Stanton ("Matthew as a Creative Interpreter of the Sayings of Jesus" [1983], 273-87) has shown that in appropriating the tradition from his sources (Mark, Q and M) the evangelist frequently expands his traditions in order to interpret them. Here, we draw attention to another redactional aspect in Matthew's composition of his Gospel, namely, that in order to emphasize or reapply a point, the evangelist omitts or summarizes traditional material from his sources, Mark, Q: it is more difficult to determine in the case of M. Here we note several examples from the sayings tradition. (1) Compared with Lk 7.1b-10, Matthew has abbreviated the pericope (Mt 8.5-13) from Q, but has inserted another Q-saying into the passage (Mt 8.11-12 = Lk 13.28-29). (2) The third saying in Lk 9.57-62 (i.e. vv 61-62) is absent from Mt 8.18-22. Fitzmyer thinks that Lk 9.57-60 is from Q and 9.61-62 from L (1981:833). It is more likely that Matthew has omitted the third saying (so Marshall 1978:408). (3) In Mt 10.34-36, v 36 is most likely Matthew's own summary of Lk 12.52 from Q (Lk 12.51-53).

[118] This free composition of Mt 18.10 from the parable of the lost coin is an instance of what Paul Noble (1993: esp. 137-42)) calls the "resource-theoretic" account of composition. In this kind of composition the author is no

Having established the probable Q-origin of the synoptic parable of the lost sheep, with the Lukan version preserving more faithfully the original in the Q tradition, the overtone of the uncertainty of finding the lost sheep ("And if he finds it") in Matthew becomes the most prominent sign of the evangelist's redactional hand. If the original Q-parable has the man *finding* the lost sheep, what would have caused Matthew to change the overall shape of the parable? The answer probably lies in the parable's *literary* setting. Specifically, in justaposing the sheep parable with the material of 18.15-17, Matthew intends the former to be understood in the light of the latter. In other words, these sayings have the effect of the evangelist's shaping of the parable. Verses 15-17 envisage a disciple being reproved for his sins. They describe three hypothetical situations (ἐάν) each resulting in a certain state of affairs or further action taken by the disciple who first approached the fellow disciple thought to have sinned. The passage refers to the "reality" of the Christian community in which a disciple may accept the reproof of other fellow disciple(s); but it also envisages situations where there are obdurate disciples who refuse not only to listen to the admonition of individual disciples but even to the entire community.

In placing vv 15-20 alongside the parable, the

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longer conceived as a mere "redactor" but a creative author. On the other end of the composition spectrum is the "quotation" type of composition, akin to a scissors-and-paste compilation.

evangelist therefore reshapes the story to reflect the situation depicted in these verses: there is no certainty that the lost sheep can always be found. This connection, if accepted, then suggests that the evangelist intended vv 15-20 to illustrate or elaborate the practical reality of seeking a wayward disciple as represented in the parable.

III. Concluding Remarks

Our redaction-critical question of Matthew's motive for creating an uncertainty about finding the lost sheep leads us to a compositional scenario. Verses 15-17 has affected the evangelist's shaping of the sheep-parable. Matthew intends the two passages to be read together as a "unified" text about seeking wayward disciples. It is true that this diachronic reading is critically dependent on our reconstruction of the source-critical relationship between the two synoptic parables. Nevertheless, the above discussion demonstrates that a diachronic analysis can sometimes help point to a plausible reading of the gospel text. By the very nature of redaction-criticism, the posited reading then points to the authorial intention. This redaction-critical analysis of the synoptic parables then reinforces our literary reading in the preceeding section about 18.10-20 as a meaningful unit on seeking a disciple who has gone astray.

A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING

We recall that in our social-scientific approach, the

social ethos of the Matthean community forms an important aspect of the group's social-historical context. In addition to reading from the vantage point of the community as a symbolic construction, our reading will also be guided by insights from socio-psychological studies on speech accommodation, and from conflicts concerning criteria of group membership. Reading from these additional angles may enable us to discern further aspects of the community ethos. We shall also show, and this is probably going beyond the horizon of the evangelist himself, that a community which is "over-concerned" with the way of life of individual members may, paradoxically, induce in the member concerned a negative evaluation of the group and his membership, and may bring about partial dissolution of group solidarity.

I. The Community Ethos (i): The Group as the Embodiment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth

Just as casual everyday life conversations indicate a social reality tacitly or unconsciously assumed by the dialogue partners,[119] so the community pronouncement expressed in terms of "gentile" and "toll-collector" may indicate the central aspect of the social ethos of the community - what the group thinks of itself and its distinction from the outside world. In sociological terms, this community ethos is unconsciously verbalized in the group's expression of its symbolic boundaries.

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[119] See Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), 172-73.

Through the community pronouncement in 18.17b ("let such a person be to you as a gentile and a toll-collector") the boundaries are in effect drawn with "gentile" and "toll-collector." These stereotypical figures reflect the Matthean community's ethos which considers that people outside it are ignorant of or knowingly disregard the will of God. In contrast to the "children" imagery in 18.1-4,[120] "gentiles" and "toll-collectors" form the negative *symbolic* group boundary marker; they mirror what the community is not. This negative boundary marker thus verbalizes the central ethos of the community: a community of God's people committed to living a life of doing the will of God. The image of sinners and toll-collectors provides the community with the "language" to convey its sense of distinctiveness.

As a (negative) boundary marker, "gentile and toll-collector" are symbolic in character. The moral character of the group ("private face") may not be perceptible to outsiders. Furthermore, the stereotypical figures, as symbols, do not specify the meaning of sin (18.10,15) but provide for the members of the community the capacity to make meaning. Thus apart from flagrant immorality, the meaning of "sin" has to be supplied by members of the community. And the embodiment of sin in "gentile and toll-collector" may be conceived rather differently by different

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[120] See the social-scientific reading of Mt 18.1-4 in ch. 6.

members.[121]

In 18.15-20, the community judgment of a way of life as sinful thus has the effect of clarifying group boundaries, and thus asserting its identity. The community pronouncement is an instance of a collective act of "defining" the symbolic boundaries of the community: it clarifies what "sinfulness" means for the group. The group is thus unconsciously expressing its ethos through moral judgment: it is a community which lives a life in conformity to the will of God. Moreover, in perceiving that the community judgment has the divine sanction (18.18-20), the group has revealed the central ethos which makes what the group is: the community is the *embodiment* of the rule of God on earth. The "kingdom of heaven" is manifested in the community action: the seeking of one of its own who has gone astray and in the moral judgment of the entire community.

II. The Community Ethos (ii): a Brotherhood without Ethnic Differentiation

In the community pronouncement (18.17b), it is plausible to understand ὁ ἐθνικός in its usual ethnic sense as "gentile" (as opposed to Jews), and thus to interpret its usage by Matthew as a kind of socio-linguistic indication for a Christian group which is composed entirely of Jews and therefore has no scruples about using the word

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[121] On symbolism and the symbolic character of community boundaries, see Anthony Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community (1985), 11-21.

in its ethnic and derogatory sense.[122] On the other hand, as we have seen in chapter 4, there are texts in the Gospel which point to the extra-textual reality of the presence of non-Jewish believers in the Matthean community. If non-Jewish believers make up part of the community, albeit a small proportion, the locution of ὁ ἐθνικός καὶ ὁ τελώνης in the community pronouncement reflects a social-psychological aspect of Matthew's community, namely, the self-perception of individual members.

This can best be appreciated from the perspective of Matthew's accommodation to the language of his community. Speech accommodation theory, it is recalled, suggests that for achieving social identification and/or effective communication, speakers generally adjust to the language of their interlocutors.[123] So Matthew is apparently confident that in his use or retention of the traditional phrase ὁ ἐθνικός καὶ ὁ τελώνης to designate an unrepentant disciple, the apparently disparaging connotation of ὁ ἐθνικός would not cause offence to his non-Jewish members.[124] In this ethnically mixed community, the ethnic sense of ὁ ἐθνικός,

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[122] On similar line of interpretation, see J. Leslie Houlden, "The Puzzle of Matthew and the Law" (1994), 123-24.

[123] See ch. 4 on the discussion of speech accommoda-tion theory.

[124] In a language experiment designed by R.Y. Bourhis and H. Giles which created an interethnic set-up (Welsh-English), a strong feeling of Welsh identity was evoked among the Welsh participants when the their ethnic identity was threatened by the experimenter's deliberate disparaging of the Welsh language. See Bourhis and Giles, "The Language of Intergroup Distinctiveness" (1977).

which would normally have meant "gentiles" for Jews, has probably receded to the background, and the phrase instead carries a predominantly religious connotation ("non-believer") so that together with "toll-collectors" both terms are understood as representing people who are ignorant of or knowingly disregard God's will. The non-ethnic sense of the word is indeed attested in the writing of 3 John (v 7: "having accepted nothing from τῶν ἐθνικῶν"), and in *Hermas* (m10.1.4: ἐμπεφυρμένοι ... φιλίαις ἐθνικαῖς).[125]

This interpretation from a speech accommodation perspective coheres with the view that the discourse represents an *intra-group* communication so that the relevant lexical meaning is a function of the social relationship in the group. In fact, the discourse as it is represented in the gospel narrative is an instance of what Basil Bernstein calls a speech of "restricted code" which is relatively context-tied in comparison with that of an "elaborated code."[126] In such a speech encounter in which

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[125] See also the juxtaposition of οἱ τελῶναι and οἱ ἐθνικοί in Mt 5.46-47, and οἱ ἐθνικοί in 6.7 as well. From the vantage point of speech accommodation, οἱ ἐθνικοί there may also carry the non-ethnic sense. Similarly, τὰ ἔθνη in Mt 6.32 and 28.19 probably also has the non-ethnic sense, meaning, respectively, "non-believers" and "all the nations." For τὰ ἔθνη in the New Testament epistles which convey religious connotation designating non-Christians rather than non-Jews ("gentiles"), see 1 Cor 5.1; 12.2; Eph 4.17 (cf. 2.11-21); 1 Thess 4.5; 1 Pet 2.12 (cf. 2.9f); 4.3f. See also, e.g., *Hermas* s 1.10; Ignatius, *Trallians* 3.2; 8.2; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 19.1. In Polycarp, *Epistle* 11.2, the Latin "gentes" apparently refers to non-Christians.

[126] B. Bernstein, "Social Class, Language and Socialization" (1972), 163-66.

the participants share common assumptions and perception of reality, "the form of social relationship acts selectively in the meaning to be verbalized, which in turn affects the syntactic and lexical choices."[127] Thus in our discourse as an intragroup communication, it is important that ὁ ἐθνικός be viewed from the perspective of the evangelist and the first recipients who inhabited the same social world. Speech accomodation theory, then, converges with the restricted-code speech to point to ὁ ἐθνικός being understood in the Matthean community in the non-ethnic sense.

This reading has significant implications for understanding the self-conception of the members of the Matthean community. For it appears that the sense of identity derived from membership of the community of Jesus[128] has largely blurred the ethnic differentiation of individual members. This suggests a feeling of community in intra-group interaction which transcends ethnic demarcation. *In the midst of their fellow members*, non-Jewish believers would not perceive themselves along ethnic lines, nor would the Jewish members, and ὁ ἐθνικός becomes for them stereotypical of people who are ignorant of God's will. Instead, they would regard one other as "brother"

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[127] B. Bernstein 1972:165.

[128] On self-awareness in the first-century Mediterranean social world as embedded in the group to which individuals belong, see Bruce Malina, "The Individual and the Community - Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity" (1979), 126-32; "Dealing with Biblical (Mediterranean) Characters" (1989), 127-31.

(18.15,21), all being "little ones" before God (18.6,10,14). And for the Matthean community, the word "brother" carries a connotation of brotherhood created by the bond of being disciples of Jesus, a brotherhood which transcends ethnic boundaries.

III. An Overt Threat to the Sense of Community

From a sociological perspective, Matthew's exhortation through Jesus' words, if heeded by his community, will have the effect of enhancing the sense of community and sustaining the group's continued existence.

For a "deviant" group to sustain its continued existence, regular contacts and significant participation of individuals within the subculture are essential. They foster the sense of community.[129] Apart from the so-called "total institutions" in which all the spheres of the individuals' lives are confined to an organized community in the same location, members of a deviant subculture normally participate in social life outside their group, spending their "work week" in the conventional society.[130]

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[129] From a social-psychological point of view, a sense of community is essentially a feeling of community life. It is a feeling which includes a feeling of participation (i.e. of being a part of the group), love, and societal play, which refers to all facets of social activities in a group. See Lloyd Sandelands, "The Sense of Society" (1994), and "The Concept of Work Feeling" (1988). See also John Shotter, "Prolegomena to an Understanding of Play" (1973).

[130] Erving Goffman divides "total institutions" into five rough groupings: (i) homes for caring the aged, blind and other handicapped people, (2) mental hospitals and sanitaria for those incapable of looking after themselves and felt to be a threat to the public, albeit unintentionally, (3) prisons, (4) boarding schools, army

But it is the participation in their own identity-conferring subculture which is socially significant and psychologically satisfactory to people belonging to a subculture.[131] What is important, then, is not the simple measurement of time spent in a subculture, but the amount of *significant* participation within it.[132]

Unlike the Jews of the Qumran community at the Dead Sea who lived in self-seclusion from the rest of Jewry, the Matthean Christians settled themselves in the local community. The "Matthean community" is therefore a social group which is much less encompassing than the total institution. In contrast to causal interaction with

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barracks and other institutions established for the pursuit of some social task, (5) religious institutions such as abbeys, convents and monasteries. In total institutions, the daily activities of each member is performed in the close company of others. These institutions generally display a basic split between a large managed group (the "inmates") and a supervisory staff, and hence the corresponding existence of two different "worlds" of the two groups within the "closed" community. For a general characterization of total institutions, see Goffman, *Asylums* (1961), 15-22. Perhaps, the Qumran community at Dead Sea is the closest ancient version of our modern total institution.

[131] On social identity (in contrast to "personal identity") from a social-psychological perspective, see Henri Tajfel, "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison" (1978), 63: "social identity will be understood as that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significnace attached to that membership." See also Glynis Breakwell 1978:303; John Turner and Rupert Brown 1978:202-5; John Turner 1982:17-20. For more detailed delineation of a social-psychological account of identity see John Greenwood, "A Sense of Identity: Prolegomena to a Social Theory of Personal Identity" (1994).

[132] Robert Bell, *Social Deviance* (1971), 25.

"outsiders," corporate worship, probably on Sunday,[133] and baptismal rites for admitting new converts (cf. 28.19)[134] constituted their *significant* involvement in the community.[135] For it is in these gatherings that the Matthean Christians felt themselves most strongly to be members of a distinct group, especially set apart from unbelieving Jews centring around their synagogue(s).

The exhortation in 18.5-6 to mutual love and assistance among the disciples in everyday life hardship[136] suggests another instance of significant community involvement.

This participation in community activities provides a scenario for understanding 18.10-20. In this passage, the

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[133] In Acts 20.7-12 we probably have the earliest reference to a Christian Sunday evening worship in a household setting (so F.F. Bruce 1954:407-8; D.R. de Lacey 1982:128-33). Pliny's *Epistle* (10.96) shows that at least in Bithynia by the end of the first century the Christians were gathering for worship before dawn and again in the evening on the same day, presumably on Sunday. On the widespread practice of early Christians meeting on Sunday for worship, probably traceable to first century Palestinian church, see R.J. Bauckham's fine study, "The Lord's Day" (1982). For description of Christian worship, see *Didache* 14; Ignatius, Eph. 20.2; Justin, *Apology* I, 67.

[134] Baptism in running water is attested in *Didache* 7 (with identical baptismal "formula" as in Mt 28.19b) by a Christian community which most probably had access to the Gospel of Matthew. Cf. textual resemblance to and reminiscence of Matthew's Gospel in *Didache* 8.1-2; 9.5c; 10.5b; 12.1; 15.4; 16.1,3-7; and the use of "his Gospel" or "the Gospel" in the sense of a "book" in 8.2; 11.3; 15.3,4.

[135] There could also be gathering of part of the community for preparation with those to be baptized. See *Didache* 7.4 which mentions fasting by part of the community some days before baptism: those to be baptized, the baptizing one and others who were able to.

[136] See ch. 7 on the social-scientific reading of Mt 18.5-9.

exhortation for concern of spiritual well-being of members of the community makes the restoration of erring members an important experience of communal life. Both the individual and group effort involve the "spiritual" disciples[137] in visiting the member thought to be going astray and presumably also in intense personal interaction with the disciple concerned. This has the similar effect in increasing the amount of significant participation within the Matthean community.

However, it is in the communal gathering that the sense of community, a feeling of the communal life invol ing the entire group, is experienced most intensively and the community identity most ac utely felt.[138] In particular, in the assembly which seeks the divine guidance for moral judgment, there is the intense experience of the moral aspect of the community. There is perhaps the mystic experience of a "group mind," feeling the dynamic life of a community united in one mind in its corporate communion with the risen Jesus.[139]

This communal concern for the spiritual conditions of its member would generally enhance the sense of community. But we perceive that if this community action (18.15-17)

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[137] Cf. Gal 6.1a: "Brother, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (RSV).

[138] See the above discussion on social ethos in connection with the community as the embodiment of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and as a brotherhood with no ethnic differentiation.

[139] See Lloyd Sandelands/Lynda St. Clair, "Towards an Empirical Concept of Group" (1993).

has become "institutionalized," it may produce an unpleasant atmosphere within the community. First the ethos thus fostered would leave practically little room for "private life style "; one's life becomes the object of concern of all other group members. Secondly, the communal gathering for the moral resolution has come close to some form of "public trial" with the result that non-conforming members are effectively alienated from majority of the community. Thus while concern for the spiritual well-being of members may enhance a sense of community (18.10-17), there is, paradoxically, an actively adverse side to it. A communal "trial" may build into it a "mechanism" capable of inducing a negative evaluation of the community and its membership, and bring about a partial dissolution of solidarity within the group. In the worst situation, this communal action may force some members to leave the group. We refer here to studies by G. Breakwell of an intra-group phenomenon relating to the presence of an incompatibility of external and internal criteria of group membership.[140]

This social-psychological perspective is based on (1) the need of individuals for a positive social identity, (2) legitimacy of membership of a group effectively defined by the group and perceived by individuals, and (3) social identity as having a content (derived from group membership) and a mechanism which acts upon this content. The external membership criteria *are* a set of rules and

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[140] Glynis Breakwell, "Some Effects of Marginal Social Identity" (1978).

norms defined by the group for entry into membership. Internal criteria refer to an individual's perception of the membership criteria, his beliefs and knowledge about group membership, and expectation and aspiration relating to anticipation of changes in group structure and desire for such changes. If external and internal criteria are compatible, individual members acquire a stable social identity. On the other hand, whenever incompatibility of external and internal criteria of group membership exists, the individual concerned will attempt to alter the intra-group or/and inter-group relationship in such way as to eradicate or reduce the incompatibility.[141] If, despite attempts of resolution, incompatibility remains, the result is a state of ambivalence. Ambivalence is a failure in the individual to develop permanent affiliation to the group to which one belongs, a swinging between poles of positive and negative attitudes toward members of one's group and being a member of the group.[142] The individual is thus in a traumatic situation of non-belonging, undergoing the process of an identity crisis.

The intensity of the resolution of this incompati-

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[141] G. Breakwell (1978:307-8) illustrates the process of resolution of the conflict of membership criteria with the case of a shop steward having been promoted to a foreman ("a superior group").

[142] In his social-psychological studies of intergroup relations, "Interindividual Behaviour and Intergroup Behaviour" (1978), esp. 28-29, Henri Tajfel stresses that the notion of membership refers to more than the awareness of belonging to a group; it includes the important aspects of evaluation and emotion towards the group and being a member of the group.

bility is dependent upon whether the threat to the individual's status (identity) in the group is overt or implicit, that is, whether the incompatibility of membership criteria is made public or not. If external conditions do not change, continued ambivalence will, on an intra-psychic level, result, in the individual, in a negation of identity. At the intra-group level, intense ambivalence can hamper solidarity of the group and even cause internal fragmentation: disconcerted members who fail to resolve membership incompatibility may leave the group to form their own group, or join another. According to Breakwell, a group which constantly induces ambivalence would be disunited; eventually either there will be fragmentation of the group, or the group may modify its membership criteria to pave the way for reduction of incompatibility.[143]

In the light of the above discussion, the scenario envisaged in 18.15-20 represents situations of success or failure in resolving incompatibility of external and internal membership critieria. All members recognize that confession of faith in Jesus of Nazareth *and* the demand of living a life in accordance with his teaching constitute the criteria of group membership. It is the latter "rule" concerning obedience to Jesus' teaching which gives rise to ambiquity in group "boundaries," as the words of Jesus in their oral/written forms are open to different possible interpretations in the flux of changing life situations.

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[143] The above is a summary of Breakwell's basic thesis (1978), see esp. pp. 301-9.

Since the interpretation of Jesus' words rests with the entire group, the communal judgment at 18.17 (as we have seen) represents an instance of the community's clarifying its boundaries through its understanding of Jesus' teaching regarding the proper way of life. Incompatibility of group and individual membership criteria (external and internal) arises as the result of conflicting interpretations of Jesus' words held by the individual concerned and the rest of the group as applied to a given life situation or a particular conduct.

Thus, 18.15-16 represents a situation in which an individual member resolved the incompatibility in the direction of the group's criteria, probably understanding that the other members' admonition and judgment represent the group's interpretation of Jesus' teaching. In this situation, compatibility between group and individual criteria is restored, and the individual's social identity is secured.

In 18.17-20, we have an individual member's continued non-conformity to the group's interpretation of Jesus' teaching. The situation is an incompatibility of external and internal membership criteria which is *socially displayed* - the disciple now openly defies the judgment of the entire community regarding the right way of conduct of life. Even if the community sentence (18.17b) does not amount to an expulsion from the group, the pronouncement in effect has negated his status within the community; the unrepentant disciple has become essentially a "marginal"

member, belonging to neither world, the (particular) Christian group and the unbelieving society at large. The incompatibility has posed a threat to the disciple's self-perception. Since the incompatibility has become public, the individual's experience of ambivalence is a traumatic one. The potent force of an open incompatibility will presumably intensify the further process of resolution. With the incompatibility being now made public, the person cannot sustain the state of ambivalence for a very long time. Eventually, the disciple either will have to submit to the community's interpretation of Jesus' teaching and its judgment of his way of life, or he will have no option but to leave the group. Assuming that he does not reject his faith in Jesus, the disconcerted individual will probably form a new group with other members of the community who have experienced the same traumatic experience of incompatibility and have thus left the group to which they have once belonged.

The above sociological projection of a possible negative scenario in the Matthean community represents a feasible realization latent in the community ethos which perceives that group membership consisted not only in the confession of faith in Jesus but also in a moral norm of living a life complying to the teaching of Jesus. However, since the words of Jesus in their written (or oral) form may entail different possible interpretations in different life situations, the group boundaries are inevitably "porous." This ambiguity of group boundaries would be

brought to the foreground when the community's life has developed further in the direction advocated by the evangelist, namely, towards an ethos which perceives the moral life of individual members as the concern of the entire community and publicized through the communal action (18.15-20). As we shall see in the next chapter in our social-scientific reading of 18.21-35, the emphasis on forgiveness will also pose a threat to one's group membership, albeit in a covert form.

IV. Reading/Listening Experience: Articulation of Feeling and Seeing Things in a New Light

If the foregoing discussion represents a hypothetical projection of a feasible scenario induced by incompatibility of membership, a feeling of not really belonging to the group, reading this text would probably evoke some unpleasent feeling in those disciples who recognized a sense of incompatibility of membership. The following reading, however, is construed as *typical* reading/aural experience among members of the Matthean community.

For Jews, apart from brotherhood established by an alliance,[144] "brother" is a common word for one's fellow countryman.[145] In the Graeco-Roman world, the language of

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[144] E.g. in 1 Macc 12.5-18, Spartans are addressed and referred to as "brothers" by Jonathan in his letter to the Spartans for the renewal of alliance between the Jewish nation and Spartans. See also 1 Kings 9.12-13 (cf. Amos 1.9); 1 Macc 14.40.

[145] Cf. the address of Peter, Stephen and Paul to their respective Jewish audience as "brothers" in the speeches of Acts: 3.17; 7.2; 13.26,38; 22.1; 23.1,5. See also Rom 9.3;

brotherhood is applied to a variety of social relationships.[146] But as disciples of Jesus, the word "brother" reminded Mathew's community that they were a separate group within the broader Jewish community, whose boundaries are not defined in ethnic terms but by a bond of common belief and faith in Jesus.[147] Especially for the Jewish members of the Matthean community, who constitute the majority of the group, the word "brother" carried a much stronger religious connotation of difference, namely, a separation from unbelieving fellow Jews.[148]

This sense of difference would be intensified by the group's feeling of its being ostracized as "deviant" within the Jewish community. To counter socially and psychologically this feeling of isolation and rejection, the community needs a stronger group self-image other than the images provided by "children," "little ones,"[149] and the negative stereotypical figures of gentiles and toll-

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Lev 19.17 (cf. 19.18); Ps 22.22; Tob 1.3,16; 2 Macc 1.1.

[146] Plato (*Menexenus* 239a) used ἀδελφός for fellow-countryman; Xenophon (*Anabasis* 7.2.25,38) used it for friends; in Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.45,126, Jonathan is addressed by Alexander as "brother." For reference to members of religious society, see Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (1930), 9.

[147] Cf. Josephus, *War* 2.122 "brothers" is used of members of the Essene community.

[148] Cf. Mt 28.15 referring to "Jews" (Ἰουδαῖοι) of the evangelist's day ("to this day") who remain unresponsive to the message preached by Jesus' disciples.

[149] See the discussion of communal self-image in the social-scientific reading in ch. 7.

collectors.[150] The sense of brotherhood recalls members of the Matthean group of Jesus' parable in the temple-tax incident (17.24-27) which compares himself and his disciples with members of royal household. As brotherhood carries for them a sense of difference, distinguished not by ethnic origin but by the bond of belief in Jesus, the passage in 17.24-27 thus evokes within them the familial image: they are the *true* "sons of God" and their community the "household of God," with God their heavenly Father. This Christian sense of being the household of God on earth is reinforced by the ethos of the community which perceives the group as embodying the rule of God. As the household of God, the community is the locus of divine presence. This divine presence is especially experienced in the community assembly when it gives the unanimous verdict of its moral judgment (18.15-20).

As constituting the household of God, members of the Matthean community would come to perceive Jesus' words as articulating for them what it meant to be a "brother" to one another within God's family. They would recall Jesus' previous demand for assisting members who are in need (18.5f). Now, they would come to see that just as each and every sheep of the flock is valued by the shepherd, so God regards every son of his household as equally of great worth. And this constitutes the ground that they should not despise any of them who has gone astray, but rather to seek after the straying brother for his eternal salvation.

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[150] See the preceding discussion on community ethos.

V. Concluding Remarks

(1) Our reading of 18.10-20 from social sciences perspective indicates once again the nature and character of a social-scientific approach. The reading is heavily dependent on the kind of socio-historical scenarios one envisages, and the interpretative categories which are brought into interaction with the text. In our own approach, the social-scientific reading is guided and shaped by the following scenarios: the social ethos of the Matthean community and its experience as a deviantized minority group within the Jewish community.

(2) Our social-scientific reading enables us to perceive in 18.10-20 a revealing of the ethos of the Matthean community as a group which embodies the rule of God in the world (especially in the group's seeking of one of its members going astray) and in a "brotherhood" which transcends ethnic differentiation.

(3) On the view that the Matthean community was an ethnically mixed group, the evangelist was seen to accommodate to the language of his community so that ὁ ἐθνικος is understood in non-ethnic sense. This sense of the word is not perceived in a literary reading undertaken by a modern reader whose interpretative context, including its social location, is completely different from that of the historical audience.

(4) Our social-scientific reading leaves the meaning of the disciple's "sinfulness" unspecified, remaining ambiguous even for the first audience. In fact, its

meaning, if one wished to explore it, can be constructed in a literary interpretation by relating it to the portraying of the disciples in the narrative, as it is done in our previous literary reading of the passage. Similarly, the sense of the risen Jesus' "presence" in the midst of the community's gatherings is left open in our social-scientific reading.

(5) Our social-scientific reading does not insist that the community pronouncement at 18.17b is to be understood as referring to an act of "excommunication". Yet the effect of the pronouncement is to call into question the membership of the disciple concerned. Eventually, the disciple must either submit to the community judgment or to leave the group. Thus, although the community practice of seeking the disciple thought to have gone astray has in general the effect of enhancing the sense of community, conveying a feeling of belonging and love to the disciple, this aspect of communal life has left little room for private morality and may have the "adverse" effect of inducing a negative evaluative and emotional sense on some of the members of the group.

Chapter 9

INTERPRETATION OF Mt 18.21-35

A LITERARY READING

As seen in chapter 8, 18.21-35 is related to vv 10-20; both sections are concerned with "sinfulness" within the community of Jesus' disciples. However, the distinction is also significant, for each views sinfulness from a different perspective, that of a disciple's sinful way of life and of individual personal offences. Whereas a sinful way of life entails admonition for a change in direction of life, personal conflict requires mutual forgiveness. Forgiveness is the final aspect of humility to be addressed in the discourse.

I. The Flow of Thought

The transition to the theme of forgiveness is effected through a shift in narration: a dialogue is introduced which then leads to Jesus' teaching on divine and human forgiveness. The Greek particle *τότε* in 18.21 probably indicates temporal continuity[1] - Peter's question follows right after Jesus' words at v 20.[2] Jesus' teaching on a

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[1] For *τότε* as a correlative adverb of time to introduce what is to follow, see also Mt 2.7; 4.1,5,11; 8.26; 12.38; 25.34-45.

[2] It is interesting to note, as pointed out by Graham Stanton, that the new English translation NRSV (but not RSV) leaves a major gap between verses 18.20 and 21. It is probable that the topographical gap reflects the translators' view of a change of topic from vv 10-20. See probably also the same "paragraphical device" in the NRSV to indicate thematic change in the narrative at 13.1; 16.13

disciple's straying into sin has probably elicited from Peter the query concerning another aspect of the relationship between the disciples. He asks: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" (18.21) The question receives a lengthy answer from Jesus, which constitutes the remaining part of the discourse.

Whether the Greek ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά in Jesus' reply (18.22) means seventy-seven times[3] or seventy times seven[4], the figure of multiples of seven denotes forgiveness in its "completeness," in contrast to Peter's generous offer of forgiveness ("seven times") but still a limited forgiving.[5] Jesus' reply to the inquiry of Peter is thus unequivocal and striking: true forgiving means there is no limit to one's forgiving (v 22).

(not RSV); 21.1 (not RSV); 24.1. Except for 7.28, there is thematic gap at the end of each major discourse. The NRSV also leaves paragraphic gap apparently to indicate indefinite "narrative time gap" between two narrated events, cf. 2.1; 3.1; 4.12; 4.23; 21.1 (but why not at 12.1?), although we do not see a narrative time gap at 18.20 and 21. See also paragraph gaps for time gap (?) between 7.28 and 8.1; 17.24-27 and 18.1.

[3] E.g., JB, NIV, NRSV, RSVmg (cf. ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτάκις in D). See W. Bauer et al, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἑβδομηκοντάκις.

[4] E.g., RSV, NEB, REB.

[5] The number seven, or its multiples, is sacred among Semitic peoples, and denotes completeness, perfection or consummation. Thus in Gen 4.24 the seventy-sevenfold vengence (ἑβδομνκοτάκις ἑπτά in LXX) in the Song of Lamech denotes Lamech's unabridled revenge. See *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "seven".

Although in various contexts "seven" may stand for a moderately large number (Mt 12.45; cf. also Prov 24.16), in Peter's question the seven times of forgiveness which he proffers clearly conveys the plain numerical sense.

To explain what he has said, Jesus tells the parable of a king and his unforgiving servant. The story consists of a three-scene "drama" (vv 23-27,28-30,31-34):

Scene 1: The king's accounting, remitting a servant of an unimaginably huge debt out of compassion.[6]

Scene 2: The servant's accounting (after his release by the king), without mercy throwing into prison a fellow servant who owned him a relatively small debt.

Scene 3: The fate of the unmerciful servant, with the king's explanation for the severe punishment.

In the words of F.D. Bruner: "The parable began with judgment ..., was centered in grace ..., but ends with judgment."[7] The first scene thus forms the basis for understanding the other two, explaining the outrage of the other servants[8] and the punitive action of the king. It is

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[6] As a fictional narrative, the parable contains elements of exaggeration such as the fantastic sum of "ten thousand talents" and the unbelievable generosity of an ancient monarch in order to call attention to some aspect of "divine reality" present in the sphere of human experience. Although the monumental sum and imprisonment for debt are reminiscent of Hellenistic imperial practice of tax-farming (cf. the story of Joseph, the son of Tobias in Josephus *Antiquities* 12.160,175-79; see, e.g., Allen 1912:200; Jeremias 1963:210; Derrett 1970; Senior 1987:404 along this line of interpretation), the experience of divine grace conveyed by the parable (as metaphor) is comprehensible to the disciples without recourse to the social cultural codes of the parable. But see Bernard Scott, "The King's Accounting: Matthew 18.23-34" (1985), who basically accepts these social cultural codes as the story's repertoire in his reader-oriented reading of the parable.

[7] Bruner 1990:661.

[8] As it appears in the story, the sense of ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα (18.31) conveyed is probably not so much of deep grief at the plight of the servant who owed one hundred denarii as the outrage at the merciless action of the first

because the servant has received such abundant mercy that his action, though legally justified, appears so outrageous to others.

With the concluding exhortation (18.35), it becomes clear that the king is the stand-in for God, the king's remission of the servant's huge debt represents divine forgiveness of sins and that the first servant with the debt the human sinner. Through Jesus' warning the parable thus acquires a referential character.[9] Divine forgiveness is without *prior* conditions but it expects, or rather demands the forgiven to forgive. The parable is therefore not an illustration of repeated forgiveness but the explanation for its *ground*,[10] which is the forgiveness of God.

II. The Understanding of the Disciples in the Narrative

In the light of the progression of the gospel story up to this point, it appears that (1) the disciples were still

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servant; so E. Linnemann 1966:110. See T.W. Manson 1949:214 for lexical evidence of this meaning. M'Neile (1915:270) combines the two senses: "sorrowful indignation." See the contrasting view of F.D. Bruner (1990:660).

[9] As in the parable of the weed (13.24-30,36-43), the referentiality of the story here is incomplete: the "other sevants" in 18.31 apparently lack a referential significance.

[10] So Donald Senior 1987:404; J. Lambrecht 1991:66; see also Davies/Allison 1991:794. Διὰ τοῦτο in Mt 18.23 does not have the usual causal force (cf. 12.27; 13.13; 14.2; 24.44). The phrase here expresses a weakened sense of "therefore" - a sense of "so then" or "to explain what I have just said." In 13.52 the phrase expresses the similar sense ("so then") in introducing a parable. For διὰ τοῦτο which makes only a loose connection with what precedes, see also 6.25; 12.31; 21.43; 23.34.

not fully cognizant of the nature of salvation in the person and work of Jesus, even though they had recognized him to be the Messiah (16.16,20),[11] and (2) the narrative in 12.1-17.27 (leading to the present discourse) does not report Jesus' further teaching on forgiveness which would guide them to understand this parable on forgiveness with new insight.[12] The disciples' referential horizon (interpretative context) in which their comprehension of Jesus' present parable occurs, then, consists primarily of their present experience of God's forgiveness and the

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[11] Cf. Mt 16.21-23; 17.22-23; 20.17-28. Even after Jesus' revealing the role of John the Baptist as Elijah in response to the question of his disciples on resurrection (17.9-13), the subsequent narrative does not appear to portray the disciples as progressing in understanding with regard to Jesus' (predicted) suffering and resurrection. The disciples continued to envisage Jesus' mission in terms of power and glory alone (cf. 20.20f). Accordingly, in their query concerning the sign of παρουσία of Jesus and of the close of the age (24.3), it is more probable that the disciples in the narrative meant Jesus' "coming" in power in his present life. Παρουσία in 24.3 must not be confused with the reader's (and hence later Christian) understanding in the sense of Jesus' "second coming;" cf. 24.27,37,39 (on his future coming). For similar readings, see Allen 1912:254; Beare 1981:463-64; see also Patte 1987:333-34. The betrayal and forsaking of Jesus in effect shows the disciples' disillusion with the one they have been following. The understanding of the characters (disciples) in the narrative world is therefore different from the understanding of the "two advents" of Jesus in second and third century Christiah writings. G.N. Stanton, "Matthew's Christology and the Parting of the Ways" (1993), esp. 112-14, has put forth the very plausible thesis that Matthew has the notion of "two comings" in view of his presentation of Jesus in both humility and future glory.

[12] In the healing of the paralytic Jesus is portrayed as startling the scribes in his proclaiming forgiveness of sins to the man (9.1-8). But it is doubtful that the disciples, if they recalled the incident, would understand the significance of Jesus' forgiving the sins of the paralytic and connect it with the parable of the unforgiving servant in the discourse.

framework of Jewish beliefs. For the disciples, a vital religious conviction is that the God of Israel is the merciful God who is willing to forgive any sinner who returns to him in repentance. And their experience of divine forgiveness is one of repeated forgiveness from God, dramatically embodied in the sacrificial cultus which indicates the continued need for repentance and atonement.[13]

Thus, in view of their religious experience and cognitive framework, the parable would *evoke* among the disciples the experience of repentance and divine forgiveness as they are embodied in the longstanding cultus of Israel. They probably understood the story as an allegory (cf. 18.35), and that Jesus was reminding them of the *familiar* truth that divine forgiveness was God's grace and hence the forgiven are to live a life of mercy forgiving others.[14] But the disciples are not in the position to "see" the parable as teaching a particular and concrete manifestation of God's mercy in *Jesus*.[15]

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[13] Cf. Lev 4.20f,26,31. On forgiveness in the OT and "Judaisms" of the second temple period, see *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2, s.v., esp. 831-35.

[14] On Jewish piety in forgiving fellow countrymen, see Sir 28.2-5; T. Zeb 8.1-3,5; m.Yoma 8.9; cf. T. Gad 6.3-4. The "meaning" of the parable as analysed by Derrett (1970: 43-46) is essentially what the disciples in the gospel narrative would understand.

[15] In his discussion of the parable in the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus, this is what Thomas Deidum is essentially saying ("The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant" [1976], esp. 210-19). While the "original" setting of the parable, and hence the way the original listeners in the historical ministry of Jesus would have understood this parable, is impossible to ascertain, the depiction of the disciples as

If they ever recalled Jesus' earlier teaching, the disciples would remember that Jesus demanded reconciliation with fellow disciples as the prior condition for their offerings to be acceptable to God (5.23f). Jesus' previous teaching about forgiving is contained in a petition in the prayer he had previously taught them (6.12); and it appeared (to them) to teach essentially the same point: that one should pray for God's forgiveness only when one has forgiven others. Jesus' subsequent admonition (6.14f) reveals what is implied in that petition - God forgives only those who forgive. For the disciples, Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant is then an expansion of his previous teaching on forgiveness. The parable teaches the gravity of human sinfulnesss against God and the depth of divine mercy, so that human inflictions one received (morally and/or materially)[16] and forgiv eness one offers fade into insignificance in comparison with the divine. And as part of Jesus' reply to personal forgiveness, the parable explains the ground for unlimited forgiveness.

III. The Understanding of the Reader

For a relatively long interval of time the reader has

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presented in the *gospel story* does not allow for them a "Christological" understanding of the parable as it would for a disciple-reader reading the Gospel long after the death of Jesus.

[16] It is plausible that economical injuries are included in the "sins" to be forgiven; cf. Ex 21.22-36; 22.5f. The "forgiving" in this situation then probably involves cancelling of financial compensation for the injury done as an expression of forgiving from one's heart (18.35).

been aware of being addressed by the risen Jesus through the words of the discourse. Consequently, the introduction of Peter as the foil for Jesus to address the matter on forgiveness has the effect of perturbing his/her reading experience. Suddenly the reader feels being "transported," as it were, from his/her own world back into the narrative world, listening to the dialogue between Jesus and his disciple (Peter).[17] On the other hand, the "disruption" of the reading experience has the positive effect of bringing the reader to perceive the difference between his/her own understanding of Jesus' parable and that of the disciple in the narrative.

In contrast to the characters whose understanding of events and of Jesus' words is "constrained" by the temporal linearity of occurrences in the narrative world in which they participated, or had knowledge of,[18] the reader (since he/she is not a "virginal reader"[19]) is in the privileged position of being capable of reading a part of the narrative in the light of the whole Gospel. Conversant with

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[17] See also the dialogues in the parable discourse. There the narrative character of the discourse is even more pronounced, effected not only by the repeated intrusions of the disciples' question and Jesus' own question to them (13.10,36,52), but also by the portrayal of spatial movements of Jesus and his disciples (13.10,36; cf.13.1f). The narrative sense is, however, weakened by the narrator's voice, breaking out of the "narrative frame" to inform the reader of the significance of Jesus' speaking in parables (13.34f).

[18] The news of the death of John the Baptist is narrated as the "flashback" in Mt 14.3-12 (cf. 4.12).

[19] See discussion in ch. 2 of the "reader" in the literary reading of Matthew's Gospel.

the entire narrative, the reader is also capable of interpreting and appreciating the various textual details. Moreover, as a disciple-reader, the reader understands the parable with its broader narrative context in the light of his/her post-Easter understanding of Jesus' messianic mission. His/her reading of the parable is, therefore, more perceptive than the disciples' hearing in the narrative.

1. *The Portrayal of Jesus in the Parable*

Above all, the reader perceives a Christological dimension in the parable which the disciples in the gospel story could not possibly have perceived at the time of the discourse in the story world.

(i) Like other "kingdom" parables in the gospel narrative, through the introductory formula, "the kingdom of heaven has become like (ὡμοιώθη)" (18.23),[20] the parable of the unmerciful servant indicates that depicted in the story is a particular act of God. In fact, with other two parables (13.24-30; 22.2-13) with the same introduction with ὡμοιώθη, the parable of the unmerciful servant depicts God's rule both in the present and future aspect, but with the emphasis falling upon the present.[21] Like the disciples, the reader perceives that the parable is

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[20] Cf. esp. the parables in Mt 13.

[21] Other words in the ὅμιος word-group: ὁμοία ἐστιν (13.31,33,44,45,47; 20.1; cf. 11.16), ὁμιωθήσεται (25.31; 7.24,26). See D.A. Carson, "The OMOIOΣ word-group as Introduction to Some Matthean Parables" (1985). See also Robert K. McIver, "The Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat (Matt 13.24-30,36-43) and the Relationship Between the Kingdom and the Church As Portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew" (1995), esp. 657-58.

relevant for the present, but he/she sees it from the post-Easter perspective. Just as the king's punitive act has an eschatological connotation, representing God's judgment in the last day, so the king's earlier act of mercy has a "present" connotation, signalling an act that has already taken place.[22] This is God's forgiveness as an unprecedent act accomplished in the redemptive death of Jesus.

(ii) In the prologue (1.1-4.11) which is privy only to the reader, the mission of Jesus is communicated to the reader from the very beginning: "to save his people from their sins" (1.21). Salvation is revealed as forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death (20.28; 26.26-28),[23] which will result in eschatological bliss (cf. 26.29).[24] Reading from a post-Easter perspective of Jesus' messianic mission, the reader comes to construe a connection between the king's forgiveness in the parable and Jesus' redemptive death which brings about divine forgiveness.

(iii) Reflection on the narrative context of the parable reinforces the Christological understanding of the

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[22] See Gundry (1982:371): "The aorist tense of ὡμοιώθν implies that the settling of accounts does not portray the last judgment, but forgiveness that has already taken place (contrast 7.24,26; 25.1)." Lambrecht also discerns in the parable a salvation-historical dimension of past, present and future (1991:62,66-67).

[23] Cf. Mt 8.16-17. The citation of Isa 53.4 in reference to Jesus' healing activity as "fulfilling" the prophecy indicates the narrative perspective which envisages deliverance from illness as anticipating Jesus' vicarious death to save his people from their sins. The citation at 2.15 of Hos 11.1 is also anticipatory, envisioning Jesus' later "exodus" from Egypt.

[24] Cf. also the blessing of salvation expressed in the beatitudes in Mt 5.3-10.

parable. Mt 17.22-18.1 leads directly to the discourse. The disciples, as characters participating in on-going events in the narrative world, apparently did not recognize the significance of Jesus' prediction of (a) his passion and (b) the temple-tax incident, for the understanding of the discourse. The reader, however, does perceive the implications of the events for the interpretation both of the discourse and of the parable of the unforgiving servant in particular.

As we have seen, Jesus' submission to paying the temple tax is both an act of gentleness and self-denial.[25] And Jesus' predicted death will be his greatest act of self-denial. In its narrative context, the parable, then, does not bring about in the reader's mind the image of (Jewish) sacrificial cultus which gives expression to divine forgiveness, as it would for the disciples (whose comprehension of Jesus' parable is limited by their interpretive context at the time in the story world). Rather, for the reader who is more perceptive to the literary context, the parable is not just about God's mercy; it calls to the mind of the reader the narrative comment of Jesus' mission to save his people from their sins (1.21) and evokes a picture of God's forgiveness through the redemptive death of Jesus.[26] The "debt" has

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[25] See ch. 6 for the literary reading of Mt 18.1-4.

[26] The different understanding is therefore the result one the one hand, of an understanding the parable in itself, and on the other, of perceiving the meaning of the parable in the light of the larger narrative. The "kingdom" parable with its referential implication thus functions

been paid by Jesus' death on the cross (20.28; cf. 26.28). To be sure, the notion of "ransom" is not part of the story of the king and his servant, but for the reader who perceives the correlation between this parable with Jesus' salvific mission, such construal is meaningful.[27]

For the reader, Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant is therefore not an allegory, for it is not describing Jewish sacrificial atonement through a story. Instead, in the light of his/her understanding of God's salvation in the work and life of Jesus, the reader perceives the parable to disclose a new reality of divine salvation and human existence.

2. *Divine and Human Forgiveness*

In the light of 18.1-4 (on humility), human forgiveness is a sign of humility. For it is a *recognition* that

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differently in calling forth different associations in the reader and the disciples in the narrative: the former Jesus' death and self-denial, and the latter the Jewish sacrificial cultus.

[27] The interpretation of the parable by Thomas Deidun (1976) and Jan Lambrecht (1991:61-65) in the "original" setting of Jesus' ministry is essentially a Christological reading. But from a narrative point of view, both authors have overlooked the fact that, given the portrayal of the disciples with regard to their understanding of Jesus' mission, the disciples in the narrative, were not in the position yet to perceive a "christological" dimension of the parable. In his essay, "The Significance of the Cross Within the Plot of Matthew's Gospel" (1993), J.D. Kingsbury provides another illustration of a reading of the significance of Jesus' death in Matthew's story from the perspective of the *reader or/and the author (Matthew)*. However, Kingsbury also stumbled in the narrative of the centurion and the Roman soldiers (27.27-37,51-54); he similarly understands their "confession" (27.54) in the Christian sense of confession of faith in Jesus. See David Sim's in-depth critique of this common interpretation (1993).

one is a forgiven sinner and hence willing to forgive those who have sinned against oneself.

In a Christological understanding of the parable in relation to its narrative context, further insight into human forgiveness is opened up. Forgiveness as an expression of humility is seen as a form of self-denial. As Jesus forgoes his right of freedom from the half-shekel tax in order not to cause unnecessary offence to others (17.24-27), and even lays down his own life to save his people from their sins (17.22f), so in truly forgiving their fellow disciples, the disciples willingly give up their claims to rights or retribution (cf.16.24).[28]

Thus conceived, the threat of eschatological judgment envisaged in the words of the king and reasserted by Jesus in his warning points back to humility as an "entrance condition" at the beginning of the discourse (18.3f). Here divine judgment motivates Jesus' disciple to forgive, a theme consistent with the Gospel's pervasive portrayal of eschatological judgment or separation *within* the community of disciples as the motivating power for proper ethical

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[28] The legal rights may include financial compensation for damaged property in connection with interpersonal conflict (see n.16 above). But here we distinguish such remission from those in a "materialistic reading" which understands forgiving to include a literal remission of debts such as incurred in everyday life *commercial* transactions, esp. for those who are socially and economically oppressed; see Sharon H. Ringe, "Solidarity and Contextuality: Readings of Matthew 18.21-35" (1995), esp. 208-11. Such a "contextual" reading is indeed plausible when the parable is read in isolation from the narrative context. However, in a literary reading "meaning" of the parable is in part derived from its immediate context of 18.21 which is Peter's question on forgiveness relating to *personal* conflicts.

disposition and conduct.[29]

Although less prominent than divine judgment as the "incentive" to live a life in conformity to the will of God, we have seen in 18.5-9 that humility (as a recognition of one's total dependence on God) is the motivating power leading a disciple to help other fellow disciples in their distress and need.[30] There is also a parallel narration in Matthew's Gospel of human action which is enabled by *divine grace*. In the gospel story this narrative perspective of divine enabling power for disciples is primarily expressed through depiction of divine presence in its various manifestations.[31]

Thus Jesus is called "Emmanuel" (1.23), and the name informs the significance of the entire ministry of Jesus on earth: in Jesus' words and actions divine presence is encountered in power, love and judgment. Divine grace as enabling power is realized in the meeting with divine power and love. Jesus bestows upon his disciples the authority and power for their mission (10.1,8). Peter is empowered to

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[29] Cf. Mt 7.21-23; 13.47-50; 18.6-9,10-14; 22.1-14; 24.9-13,45-51; 25.1-46.

[30] See the literary reading in ch. 7.

[31] Divine presence as the "potent presence" is a prominent motif underlying various biblical traditions. See Baruch Levine, "On the Presence of God in Biblical Religion" (1968). In Matthew's Gospel the "unity" of the Father, Jesus and the spirit of God with regard to divine revelation and commission is succintly expressed at 28.19 in the triune name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to whom Jesus' disciples submit themselves. On the emphasis in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus in relation to the Father or/and the spirit of God, cf. esp. 1.18-25; 3.13-17; 10.18-20; 11.25-27; 12.28; 17.5.

walk on the sea by Jesus (14.28-29). The disciples would be able to perform great miracles if only they had faith (21.18-22; cf. 17.19f). Jesus teaches them true knowledge of God so that they may live a life in accordance with his will. There is the presence of the Spirit of the Father with the (post-Easter) disciples giving them the right words with which to bear testimony of Jesus to the gentiles (10.19-20). Jesus' own "presence" in the disciples' missionary activity assists in their making of disciples for him (28.19-20). And in their gatherings, when the community has to make a judgment regarding the disciple thought to be going astray, Jesus leads the community to recognize the character of a life which conforms to the will of God so that its judgment has the divine sanction.

In the light of the narrative perspective on this dimension of divine grace, the parable may also be perceived as conveying the sense of God's grace which empowers Jesus' disciples to forgive. With Jesus' redemptive death in view, the king's words at vv 32-33 acquire a special force:

> You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

The words of the king expresses the reality of divine grace of forgiveness as a present experience, the present life as a new existence made possible by God's mercy. This sense of a transformed life is perhaps implicit in Jesus' exhortation that his disciples are to forgive "from their hearts" (18.35). The experience of God's forgiveness

becomes the power that *transforms* the hearts of Jesus' disciples so that they are able to forgive truly.[32] And this means a limitless forgiveness, for in setting a limit (however large) and counting the number of affronts unforgiveness with its concomitant feelings of anger and hatred is in fact already latent within one's heart.[33] As forgiven sinners in their new lives, mercy and forgiveness should become the "norm" and way of life and, indeed, be extended to non-believers, even one's enemies, and not just among the disciples themselves (cf. 5.38-48). While the motive for mercy and love is stated in 5.38-48 as imitation of God by Jesus' disciples as sons of God (5.48), here in this parable divine forgiveness is the source of power for the capacity of limitless forgiveness. As the enabling power, divine forgiveness forms the subjective ground of human forgiveness.

Yet, in the gospel narrative this power is not seen as absolute in holding its sway; the rule of God is only

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[32] This dimension of divine grace as enabling power for ethical action in Matthew's Gospel is overlooked by R. Mohrlang (1984:78-81,91-93) and F.D. Bruner (1990:660-61) in their discussions of divine forgiveness and divine grace in general. Both commentators do not view "ethics" in Matthew's Gospel as building on the (implicit) structure of divine grace; rather, in their view ethical incentive comes from the threat of eschatological judgment. To the knowledge of the present writer, the only NT scholars who hold the view of divine grace as power for ethical action are D.O. Via (1988: esp. 513-16) and David Rhoads (1992:461; cf. 459) in their studies of "hypocrisy" in Matthew's Gospel.

[33] While in the gospel narrative Jesus is represented as using hyperbolic speech to drive home his teaching (cf. 5.27-30, 38-42; 6.2-4; 7.1-5; 18.6,8-9; 19.24), the demand of unlimited forgiveness here actually spells out the essence of genuine human forgiveness.

partially manifested in the community of Jesus' disciples. There are apparently disciples who do not forgive from their hearts. Through their "fruit," these disciples eventually appear as the "weeds" among the "wheat" in "the kingdom of the Son of Man" and they will be separated in the time of judgment (18.35; cf. 13.24-30,36-43).[34]

3. *The Portrayal of God in the Parable*

While Jesus is "seen" to be present in the parable as the "hidden" redeeming agent in bringing about divine forgiveness, the central figure is God in the person of the king whose act and words give expression to the reality of salvation. The parable thus highlights a narrative feature of the Gospel: Jesus is the protagonist and God remains outside the human world in the narrative, participating in it only in the beginning, middle and end of the narrative.[35] Yet, although "hidden" most of the time in the

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[34] The parable thus expresses a predominant theme of the major discourses: the false disciples of Jesus will face divine judgment in the end-time: Mt 7.24-27; 10.32-39; 13.24-30,36-43, 47-50; 25.1-46. In particular, the parable of the weeds in Mt 13 envisages the presence of "evil" within the Christian community, and indicates the partial manifiestation of the reign of God in the community. See Robert K. McIver 1995 article on the parable of the weed.

[35] God "intervenes" through dreams to Joseph to tell him the reality of Mary's pregnancy (1.18-21), to flee king Herod's murderous persuance, and later to return to the land of Israel (1.18-21; 2.13-15,19-23). Divine action is also seen in the narrative of the "star" guiding the gentile magi to Jerusalem and in the dream which directs them not to return to Herod (2.1-12). God speaks from heaven affirming that Jesus is his Son (3.16-17), and in the scene of Jesus' transfiguration reaffirms to the small group of disciples that Jesus is the messiah who is the Son of God (17.1-5). Finally, in the resurrection narrative it is God who raised Jesus from death: the aorist passive ἠγέρθη in 28.6 implies divine action.

narrative, God's potent presence pervades the entire gospel narrative. As a character outside of the human world, God in Matthew's narrative functions as a "framing character." Just as a frame, though external to the picture, affects what it frames, so God's potent presence affects the reader's perception of the story.[36]

Above all through the narrator's scriptural "fulfillment citations" God is seen guiding the course of events.[37] It is God's fidelity to his salvific purpose to continue his dealings with the people of Israel that initiates and brings about the salvific events in the life and death of Jesus, as it is portrayed in the gospel narrative.

Secondly, although the gospel narrative is the story of Jesus, it is God's evaluative point of view which is established as normative in the narrative. Jesus is portrayed as coming to fulfill the "law and the prophets"

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[36] On discussion of framing characters in modern novels, see Mary D. Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character* (1978), 113-26. Although the terminology is a modern one, it offers a useful conception for understanding Matthew's narrative. See also C. Clifton Black, "Depth of Characterization and Degree of Faith in Matthew" (1989), 612-13.

[37] In the first two "formula citations," 1.22f and 2.15, God (κύριος) is expressly stated to be guiding the narrated events. Though without the explicit mention of God, the same sense of divine guidance in the life of Jesus is convyed by the other formula citations (2.17-18; 2.23; 4.14-16; 8.17; 12.17-21; 13.35; 21.4-5). See also other fulfilment citations at 26.31,54 regarding the course of salvific events under divine direction. In this connection, see R.A. Richards's reading of Matthew's Gospel (1985:11-18,27,47,49; cf. p. 46).

through his life and teaching (5.17f).[38] Discipleship is portrayed in terms of perceiving with the mind of God and doing the will of the heavenly Father,[39] and Jesus' teaching is but the revealing of the divine will.[40] Thus, through Jesus' teaching, God's will is made normative for disciples' conduct of life.

In the light of this portrayal of God as the framing character in Matthew's narrative, the parable of the unforgiving servant (like other "kingdom" parables) is paradoxically a "deframing" of God in the gospel narrative in the sense that the parable brings God *into* the narrative world, and thus provides the reader with a pictorial way of seeing the salvific act of God in the human world.[41]

In portraying a scenario in which the servant was forgiven his debt and then the forgiveness was later revoked, the parable pictures a salvation (affirmed by Jesus' warning) which can be "forfeited" by those who have not lived a life of mercy.[42] Such a possibility has in fact

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[38] Cf. also Mt 3.13-15 and the "formula citations" (1.22-23; 2.15; 2.17-18; 2.23; 4.14-16; 8.17; 12.17-21; 13.35; 21.4-5) through which the narrator invites the reader to view along with him the various aspects of Jesus' life and teaching as the "fulfillment" of the prophecies.

[39] Cf. Mt 7.21-23; 12.45-50; 16.23.

[40] Cf. Mt 7.21,24-27; 11.25-27; 28.20.

[41] The parables of the weeds among wheat, the dragnet, the wedding feast, and other "kingdom" parables have similar "deframing" function in bringing God into the narrative world.

[42] See also Schweizer 1975:379 (cf. p.375, the title for 18.21-35: "Loss of Grace"); Deidun 1967:217-19; Meier 1978:134; Bruner 1990:660.

already been indicated in another direction in a disciple causing others to stumble in their faith (18.6-9) or straying into a sinful life (10-14). The parable, however, does not merely indicate another way through which a disciple may l se his/her salvation. For it expresses in pictorial imagery a positive way of understanding divine salvation as cons titutive of grace and demand, a reality which is implied in the Sermon on the Mount in its demand of greater righteousness (5.20; 7.21-23). The parable depicts a seemingly banal salvific truth that forgiveness of sins as God's grace must somehow be "actualized" or "appropriated" by Jesus' disciples so that it becomes effective. And to appropriate God's grace is not a mere passive reception. As indicated clearly in the parable, to receive the divine grace is to live a life of forgiveness; genuine forgiveness must be practised in order for divine forgiveness to become effective.

IV. Concluding Remarks

In its narrative context, as part of the reply to Peter's query on forgiveness, Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant shows that divine forgiveness is its motivation. The parable also indicates the community of Jesus as a body of forgiven sinners, yet with the possibility of forfeiting the divine grace for those who stay back in the "old world" of legal rights and claims.

In our literary reading, it is shown, once again, that the "meaning" of Jesus' words needs to be construed. The

construal ("interpretation") is a function of two series of constraints, internal (textual) and external (interpretative context). The difference in interpretation is exemplified in the understanding of the disciples as characters in the narrative world and of the reader.

As participant in the narrative world, the disciples' understanding of Jesus' words is restrained by their limited perspective: their apprehension of Jesus' mission at that particular (story) time, and the religio-cultural codes (pre-70 "Judaism"). For the reader, he/she reads from a post-resurrection perspective fully aware of the salvific significance of Jesus' life and death, and hence "hears" Jesus' parable with deeper perception. Thus, because of its metaphorical character, the same parable evokes a different "universe" for the reader and the disciple-character, since each perceives the world with a different perspective.

The textual constraint is operative in the way the present part of the discourse is seen to be related to the other parts of the discourse and the gospel narrative as a whole. The disciples in the narrative are apparently not portrayed as tending to look back to preceding occurrences and perceive the significance of Jesus' parable in the light of the transpiration of the events. In contrast, the reader reads from the overview of the events leading to the discourse, and is able to see their significance for the interpretation of the discourse. The difference is therefore between an understanding achieved in reading the discourse in relative isolation, and one which perceives the

discourse in the light of the whole gospel narrative and from the perspective of post-Easter faith.

A REDACTION-CRITICAL READING

I. Synoptic Comparisons

As we have seen previously, in his composition of the present discourse the evangelist is guided by the events described in Mark 9.30-32,33-37 about Jesus' (second) prediction of his passion/resurrection and the disciples' dispute on greatness. But for the purpose in emphasizing the theme of humility as an inner disposition Matthew adopts a different approach by choosing the pericope of the temple tax to preface the disciples' question of greatness. The overall synoptic comparison is tabulated as follows:

Matthew	Luke	Mark
17.24-18.4	-----	9.33-37
18.5	-----	9.37a
18.6	Lk 17.2	9.42
18.7	Lk 17.1	-----
18.8-9	-----	9.43,45,47
18.10-14	15.4-7	
18.15	17.3b	
18.16-17	-----	
18.18	-----	
18.19-20	-----	
18.21-22	17.4	
18.23-35	-----	

Source-critically, Mk 9.37a is the source behind Mt 18.5; Mt 18.10-14 is largely reshaped from Jesus sayings preserved in Matthew's sayings source.[43] Mt 18.6f and 18.15,21-22 are reminiscent of Lk 17.1-2 and 17.3-4

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[43] For redaction-critical discussion of Mt 18.1-4, 5-9 and 10-14 see the respective section in chs. 6,7,8.

respectively and suggest that Matthew is following a Q-text, which differs quite significantly from the Lukan version.

Thus, Mt 18.15-17 may come from the evangelist's sayings source (Q^{mt}), a passage corresponding to, but radically different from Lk 17.3b ("If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him"). Matthew then adds further material to complete the theme on straying by adding Jesus sayings related to the authority of the community (18.18,19-20). From a redaction-critical point of view, 18.18 is a doublet of 16.19, and 18.19-20 probably come from Matthew's special material (M). As we have seen in the section on redaction-criticism in chapter 8, the evangelist has modified the parable of the lost sheep (vv 10-14) from his sayings source (Q) and joined them to another set of sayings (vv 15-20) in it to form a unified passage on the double theme of not despising a disciple who is going astray and the way to restore those gone astray.

Matthew has probably changed a Q-saying from his sayings source (Q^{mt}), one that is perhaps similar to that in Luke 17.4 ("and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, I repent, you must forgiven him"), into a dialogue between Jesus and Peter on forgiveness (18.21-22)[44] in order to let Jesus tell a parable (18.23-34) as part of his answer to Peter's question. Thus, Matthew has modified a Jesus saying on

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[44] See E. Linnemann 1966:106; W.G. Thompson 1970:234-35,237; J. Lambrecht 1991:58; Davies/Allison 1991:781, 792.

forgiveness and adapted an existing parable from the tradition available to him (M)[45] to expand on the theme of forgiveness. Verse 35, in its present form as the "application" of the parable, is from his own hand.[46]

II. Matthew's Transformation of the Parable

Since the parable is found only in Matthew's Gospel, any reconstruction of its plausible pre-Matthean form and content is a delicate process. For any supposed alteration by the evangelist from the tradition behind the gospel parable must necessarily be an inference from "evidence" of the present form of the text itself - discerning of "internal tensions" or any other "infelicity." And this is done in the light of some of Matthew's redactional pattern established from the rest of the Gospel.[47] Based on these two working principles, the probable major Matthean redaction may consist of the following alterations of the "original" parable: (1) the addition of the word "king" to qualify the ἄνθρωπος in 18.23, (2) changing the currency from "denarii" to "talent," thus inflating the debt to an

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[45] Despite the presence of Matthean vocabulary and style, we concur with prevalent scholarly opinion, *contra* R. Gundry (1982:371-72), that a pre-Matthean tradition underlies the parable. See,e.g., E. Linnemann (1966:106), Thomas Deidun (1967), Martinus De Boer (1988), Davies and Allison (1991:794-95), J. Lambrecht (1991:56-57).

[46] On the general consensus, see, e.g., De Boer 1988:219-21; Lambrecht 1991:60-61; Davies/Allison 1991: 803 and n.64 (on words characteristic of Matthew).

[47] F.W. Beare (1981:383) has expressed reservations concerning the credibility of reconstructing a plausible pre-Matthean parable from the parable which is found only in Matthew.

astronomical amount (18.24), and (3) the substitution of προσεκύνει for παρεκάλει in 18.26 (cf. v 29).[48] If these are the major additions and alterations, the parable then bears a close proximity in both *content* and *shape* to the "original." The pre-Matthean parable is about a man who out of mercy remits his one servant a large loan ("ten thousand denarii") but reinstates the debt because of the servant's unmerciful disposition.[49]

Without its Matthean framework, the reconstructed parable of Jesus may be interpreted in the general setting of Jesus' ministry. The parable conveys the mercy of God - this is the element of unexpectedness in the parable. Yet divine mercy demands for those who receive mercy a merciful heart to others - mercy should now become the normal way of life, and those who relapse to the old order of rights and claim will forfeit divine forgiveness.[50] For some exegetes,

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[48] Detailed redaction-critical study of this Matthean parable has been undertaken by Martinus De Boer in his 1988 article ("Ten Thousand Talents? Matthew's Interpretation and Redaction of the Unforgiving Servant"); see esp. pp. 222-29. De Boer's redactional analysis and its results are accepted by recent commentators; see Lambrecht 1991:58-61, Davies and Allison 1991:794-96. Some of the alleged "internal tensions" in the parable De Boer has "detected" have already been suggested by F.W. Beare in his commentary on Matthew's Gospel (1981:383).

[49] On the reconstructed parable, see De Boer 1988:230. In their commentary of Matthew, Davies and Allison have apparently concurred with De Boer's reconstruction (1991: 794-95).

[50] See also De Boer 1988:231. In her *Parables of Jesus* (1966), 111-13, E. Linnemann attempts to understand the parable on its own, that is, free from the Matthean context but also without specific reference to Jesus' ministry. Linnemann perceives the parable as teaching a way of looking at things which one is not used to, namely, mercy as the norm of life in which one's rights are there so far

the parable is seen as Jesus' "self proclamation" - in his person divine mercy finds its concrete and full expression.[51] And the parable story is perceived to have a performative and enabling force: the experience of divine mercy moves or enables the forgiven sinner to forgive.[52]

As we have noted, assuming the correctness of the above reconstruction of Matthew's redaction, the evangelist has essentially preserved the content and shape of the parable. De Boer rightly sees the Matthean "conclusion" (18.35) and redaction as giving the Jesus parable an allegorical character and "a christological sharpening," the divine mercy "mediated through the work of Jesus."[53]

Matthew, then, does not so much restrict the theological scope of the parable as give the parable its *application* to the question on human forgiveness.[54] In *joining* the parable to the dialogue (18.21-22) Matthew evidently intends it to form part of Jesus' answer to the query of Peter on forgiveness. Matthew's changing "denarii" to "talents" serves to stress the *depth* of human sinfulness and thus the unbelievable wonder of God's merciful

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as mercy permits it.

[51] Deidum 1967:211,214-15; Lambrecht 1991:63-64. As we have noted above in the literary reading of 18.21-35, this is the Christological reading from the reader's post-Easter perspective, not the interpretation that would be perceived by the disciples in the gospel narrative.

[52] Lambrecht 1991:65; see also Deidun 1967:217-19.

[53] De Boer 1988:231, and pp. 219-21,225,228; see also Deidun 1967:220-24; Lambrecht 1991:55,66.

[54] So Dedium 1967:221.

forgiveness.[55] The parable's message of divine mercy and human response is utilized to provide the *ground* for the umlimited forgiveness which is required of Jesus' disciples.[56] It is because of the experience of God's immense mercy that forgiving others without limit is required and made possible.

III. Concluding Remarks

(1) It is perhaps in this parable, which offers no synoptic parallel, that the difference between a reading from redaction-critical perspective and the literary reading is fully appreciated. On the basis of an existing source behind the gospel parable, a redaction-critical reading consists of the following comprehension process: (i) looking for internal tensions, incoherence or anomaly (aporia) in the gospel text, signs which reveal editorial interference with the source, (ii) restoration of the "original" text through removal of the aporia and (iii) making sense of the reconstructed parable (iv) seeing how or whether Matthew in rewording the parable and setting it in a particular narrative context has expanded or restricted the "original meaning" of the parable by underlining only some aspect of the story.

As mentioned before, since the parable is found only in Matthew, the redaction-critical undertaking involves interpretative judgment which is ultimately of conjectural

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[55] Lambrecht 1991:66-67.

[56] This is also recognized by Lambrecht 1991:66.

character. Detection of aporia in the present form of the text inevitably involves subjective evaluation of what is or is not infelicitous, what actually constitutes an anomaly or incoherence in the narrative story. This is a judgment which is influenced by a reader's own preunderstanding and bias. As to the interpretation of a parable without a context, the danger is always that an "open" parable may convey anything the reader wants it to.[57] Consequently, in view of the degree of subjectivity involved, the redactional question of how the evangelist has shaped and given the parable particular colour and a particular slant must always remain tentative.

(2) In a literary reading, a different comprehension process is operative. The parable is understood in its final form and in relation to its narrative context. Above all, as a narrative fiction the parable is presumed to make sense. Internal tensions or anomalies are not so much glossed over as considered to be part and parcel of the story; indeed, they contribute to the very message the parable is intended to convey in the discourse. Thus, there is nothing wrong in a fictional story, where an impossible debt is incurred by a king's servant, if it serves to evoke in the reader awareness of the depth of God's mercy and the gravity of human sinfulness; prostration before the king is the normal posture of a servant beseeching the mercy of the king (18.26); and reference to the king as "lord"

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[57] See Linnemann's interpretation of the parable of the unforgiving servant on its own, contrasting with that of Deidum and De Boer.

(beginning with 18.27) is the natural title pertaining to the king-servant relationship.[58]

3. Nevertheless, on accepting the above redaction-critical analysis of 18.21-35, it is worth noting that the understanding of the parable obtained from a redaction-critical perspective adds nothing new to the understanding through the literary reading of the gospel text. In our literary reading, the parable is also understood to communicate the message of the gravity of human sinfulness and the depth of God's mercy, that divine demand is closely connected with God's forgiveness and that divine mercy is the moving power for human forgiveness.

The literary reading thus highlights the question of whether redaction-criticism is an appropriate "tool" in helping to understand the *meaning* of the *final form* of a gospel text in the absence of a synoptic parallel which may form a written source for the gospel passage in question.

4. On the other hand, assuming the correctness of Matthew's reworking of the "original" parable, the congruence of the two readings from different perspectives in producing a common understanding perhaps points to the fact that at least part of our narrative reading does reveal the meaning which is indeed intended by the author of the Gospel.

In this connection, if a Matthean text has a synoptic

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[58] See, e.g., David's reference and address to Saul in 1 Sam 24.6,8; 26.13-20; the woman of Tekoa to David in 2 Sam 14.12-20; cf. also 2 Sam 14.21-22; 15.21; 18.28, 31f. See also Judith 2.15.

parallel, especially when the evangelist is following the Markan source, redaction criticism may be useful as a critical tool to help to decide whether the textual meaning obtained from a literary reading of the text does in fact correspond to the *intention* of the author.

A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING

In this final section of the discourse we have Matthew's further delineation of the community ethos in his attempt to set his community to a course of life which would enhance the self-image of the community: to foster a true spirit of forgiveness. As the embodiment of the kingdom of heaven on earth, the community should manifest a communal life which shows genuine forgiveness among its members, as demanded by their heavenly Father.

I. Community Ethos and Further Boundary Marker

As we have seen in previous discussion, the social ethos of the Matthean community is above all represented by the community's favourite expression of "kingdom of heaven."[59] In sociological terms, the phrase is the community's socially shared (verbal) symbol which provides for its members a common vocabulary to express their understanding and experience of the reality of the community.

Through the "kingdom" parable on forgiveness, Matthew enriches the symbolic meaning of the "kingdom of heaven"

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[59] See ch. 4 (pp. 92,94-95), and ch. 8 (pp. 249-51).

for his community. The parable is meant to provide members of his community with another way of looking at themselves, and at the community as the realm over which God rules. The figure of the debtor in the parable serves as the stereotype through which members of the community may look at themselves: they are forgiven sinners. The figure then functions to articulate another aspect of the meaning of humility. As with the figure of "children" (18.2-4), because of its anchoring in familiar everyday life of money borrowing, and lending and tax-farming, the figure of the debtor is capable of providing a means of experiencing psychologically the realities of sin and the extravagant mercy of God in forgiveness through the redemptive death of Jesus.

But the debtor in the parable is a debtor who does not forgive. Thus, alongside the positive value of symbolizing forgiven sinners, the debtor has a *negative* symbolic connotation. Because of his unforgiving spirit, the unmerciful servant subsequently for feits the grace he has received from the king (18.33-35). The parable thus has an emotional and eschatological appeal, moving its audience to action: to forgive because one has been forgiven. So, like the figures of the "gentile and toll-collector" (18.17b), the unforgiving servant symbolizes what the members of the community should *not* be.

In sociological terms, the figure of the debtor draws a boundary line for the community which encapsulates the identity of the community and differentiates it from the

world outside. Since the Matthean figure of debtor is an unforgiving debtor and in Jesus' warning such a person will face eternal damnation (18.35), the implication is that that those who are unforgiving do not really belong to the community. Yet this boundary marker is one which is perceptible only from within, a "private face" of the community. And, furthermore, the boundary (symbolized by the debtor) is one which is realizable only within the hearts of individual members. Looking from within, the community is a body of forgiven sinners whose lives are to be characterized by a forgiving spirit.

II. A Covert Threat to Membership and Self-Identity

On the community level, a spirit of forgiveness will certainly enhance the sense of community. But paradoxically, a spirit of forgiveness that has become a part of the community ethos has the evocative power to elicit a feeling of incompatibility of membership, that is a feeling of not really belonging to the community. As we recall from the social-scientific reading of 18.10-20 (in chapter 8), such threat can be overt when the incompatibility of membership criteria of the majority of the group and as perceived by the individual disciple concerned has become public. This explicit incompatibility of membership is envisaged in the situation in which the community attempts to restore one of its members thought to be going astray (18.15-17).

There are, however, situations where the "illegitimacy" of membership of an individual is not

apparent to the group (or the majority members of the group) but known only to the individual himself. In such a situation, the threat to group membership is covert. Together with 18.1-4, our present passage envisages an *implicit* threat to membership in that it confronts individual members with their inner being, which is known only to oneslf.

We shall begin with the demand of humility in 18.1-4. If humility has become the prevailing community spirit, an unexpressed but a kind of "group mind" that comes to characterize the community in its members interaction, individuals who find themselves living a life without a humility will come to realize that their membership is "illegitimate." This threat to membership is, however, covert, for the incompatibility is known only to the individual. The operation and effort to counter the threat to membership are not so stringent as in the case of the overt threat, manifest in the situation represented in 18.15-17. Thus, since humility is a "polyvalent" word, unless the community has come up with some precise "definition" of humility, an individual disciple can always, with relative ease, resolve the incompatibility of membership by supplying the "content" of humility with meaning he/she decides. The membership criteria are again compatible, and the individual has succeeded in removing the implicit threat to membership.

On assuming that the Matthean community as a whole has committed itself to Jesus' teaching of genuine forgiveness,

so as to create eventually the social ethos of a forgiving community, the demand and practice of genuine forgiveness, however, pose a more serious threat to the incompatibility of membership. It is true that the threat to membership is still essentially an implicit one, for an unforgiving spirit is known only to oneself and an individual member can always act, to certain extent, as a forgiving person by concealing his/her true inner thought and feeling. But unlike the criterion of general humility, the effort in resolving this incompatibility would be more stringent and involves a deliberate change of heart, for the forgiveness required is a genuine forgiveness which insists on forgiving without limit. In a community in which forgiving has become a prominent aspect of the group ethos, the feeling of being an "illegitimate" member can only be removed by this deliberate change of heart. Presumably, the individual member can live with such feeling of illegitimate membership for a relatively long period of time, but he/she would suffer a barrier to permanent affiliation to the community (ambivalence) and a gradual loss of the sense of community. In the long run, on the intra-psychic level, a constant perceiving of a "misfit" between self and the community ethos of forgiveness will eventually lead to a negation of identity.[60] In extreme circumstances, this may result in a member who has been suffering from this lasting incompatibility of membership

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[60] See G. Breakwell, "Some Effects of Marginal Social Identity" (1978), 308-9.

breaking any affiliation with the community completely.

III. Reading/Listening Experience: Seeing Things in a New Light

If the above reading represents a hypothetical scenario confronting some of the members of the Matthean community, the following construction of the reading/aural experience of Matthew's audience may be typical and more "realistic".

We recall that in a reading experience, the text may articulate for the readers some of their familiar experiences. The text can also reveal a fresh way of looking at things, opening doors to new experience.[61]

As the memory of the group seeing itself as the household of God as the result of reading or listening to the preceding passage (18.10-20) still lingers in the mind of the Matthean Christians,[62] Peter's question about seven-fold forgiveness would articulate for them the meaning of a generous forgiveness within God's family. This forgiving attitude would set them apart from the unbelieving Jewish community in which a limit of forgiving up to three times was probably a practical rule.[63] Their righteousness must exceed that of the Jewish leaders who reject Jesus as a false prophet and imposter (5.20; 27.63).

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[61] See Robert Hellenga, "What is a Literary Experience Like?" (1982).

[62] See discussion of reading Mt 18.10-20 from the audience's perspective in ch. 8 above.

[63] See, e.g., Amos 1.3,6,9; 2.1,3,6; Job 33.29-30; cf. b Yoma 86b; 87a, on the rabbinic teaching of granting forgiveness of a repeated offence three times.

From the social-psychological perspective, forgiveness is for the community a sign of brotherhood.[64] And a forgiving spirit fosters the sense of community. For with the feeling of being part of the community ("participation") and of communal life in its different facets of activities ("societal play"), forgiveness embodies the feeling of love among members of the community.[65]

But in the course of Jesus' reply, the community was led to look at forgiveness, divine and human, from a new perspective. The parable appealed to the disciples to see that in setting any limit to their forgiveness they had not really come to grasp the weight of their own sins against God. But more important, it is only in true forgiveness - one that does not consciously keep an account of the offences - that one truly experienced the depth of divine forgiveness. Furthermore, it is through genuine forgiveness in the context of communal life that one comes to experience the rule of God. Thus with respect to forgiving, the community should consider itself fundamentally different from the unbelieiving world not in terms of number but in its quality.

As in 18.1-4, the parable also led the disciples to perceive divine salvation in a new light. They were forgiven sinners, but the parable indicates that the

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[64] See the social-scientific reading of Mt 18.10-20 in ch. 8 on the Matthean community as a brotherhood with no ethnic differentiation.

[65] See Lloyd Sandelands, "The Sense of Society" (1994).

reality of salvation resides not merely in the "cancelling" by God of the "debt" of sinners; to be effective it must be "received." And this reception is not a passive receiving but, as the entire parable indicates, is inherent in the living of a life of forgiveness. In opening the door to the new perception of the reality of salvation, the parable and the warning of Jesus (18.35) apparently evoked a feeling of "insecurity," impressing a large question mark in the minds of the community members as to their ultimate status of salvation.

IV. Concluding Remarks

(1) In our social-scientific reading, the motif of forgiveness is understood as the evangelist's intention to foster a spirit of true forgiveness as an important aspect of the community life. From the modern sociological perspective, the figure of the debtor draws the symbolic boundaries of the community: genuine forgiveness differentiates, among other elements of the group boundaries, the community from the world outside. But from a social-psychological point of view, an over-insistence on this quality to the point that it becomes a "moral" inner community boundary would probably have an adverse effect on emotional value of membership with the group.

(2) The passage is also read from the perspective of the Matthean community, shaped by the social ethos of the group and its experience with the unbelieving Jewish community. The passage articulates for the community what brotherhood means in a community which is perceived as the

household of God on earth - forgiveness. But the Matthean Christians are also led to perceive the true meaning of forgiveness.

(3) The above social-scientific reading is once again very different from a literary reading. In the narrative/ reader response reading, the meaning of 18.21-35 is construed in its relation to a certain narrative feature of the Gospel, namely, the portrayal of Jesus and God in the narrative. In contrast, in the social-scientific reading above, the text is read from a presumed perspective of the evangelist and of his audience. Meaning is seen as located in the gospel writer or his original hearers or listners.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been two-fold. First, to examine the meanings of Jesus' words in the discourse which emerge from different reading processes, and the extent to which each reading differs from the others. Secondly, on the basis of the three different readings of the community discourse, to offer hermeneutical reflections on meaning and interpretative methodology, and their interrelationship. These we have done initially in the "concluding remarks" at the end of each reading. In what follows we shall put together the results of the three readings, and conclude with the hermeneutical reflections on textual interpretation in terms of reader, reading strategy, and interpretative framework.

I. Summaries of the Interpretative Readings

We shall first give the "profiles" of our readings of the community discourse from literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific approach. The literary approach seeks the meaning of the gospel text in the interrelation of its parts. Thus, in contrast to the disciples' partial comprehension based primarily on the discourse alone, the reader uses the entire story of Jesus in seeking the meaning of "humility" in the discourse. The various facets of humility are understood to be related to the portrayals of Jesus and the disciples as a character group, and also

to parts of the parable discourse and the eschatological discourse.

The meaning of humility is initially expressed in 18.1-4 through the image of children in connection with their dependence upon and obedience to parents and their social insignificance. In the light of the portrayals of Jesus and his disciples (primarily in what they say) the entire discourse emphasizes that this inner disposition of trust and obedience to God must reveal its reality in the community life in (1) a willingness to forego one's rights and interest in order not to cause unnecessary offence to others in regard to belief and faith in Jesus; (2) love and concern for fellow disciples in distress, in recognition of one's own dependence on God for his provision in every aspect of daily life; (3) an attitude which does not despise but seek those who have gone astray in order to lead them back to the right way of life; and (4) a willingness to forgive truly, realizing one's own status before God as a forgiven sinner whose sin against God is infinitely far greater than hurt and insult one receives from others.

Reading the community discourse in the light of the plot of the gospel story, including its organizing principles (plotting themes), enables the modern reader to appreciate the contemporary religious significance of humility for the community of Christian faith. The gospel narrative is perceived as written in such a way as to evoke a sense of divine presence in the "encounter" with the risen Jesus

through the act of reading the story of Jesus. The disciples are thus portrayed as addressing Jesus as "Lord," and the discourses present Jesus as speaking past the disciples to the reader. In reading the story of Jesus, the reader encounters the risen Jesus in his words, especially in the extended speeches in the major discourses.

As well as being God's agent of salvation, Jesus' words are also a way through which Jesus' people are saved from their sins - from falling away from God's saving grace through a life that runs counter to his will. The community discourse serves this salvific purpose in putting forth the right path of community life for Jesus' disciples. In broader perspective, Jesus' words in the community discourse prepare his disciples for proper attitude and way of life to counteract the Devil's subversive actions. After failure to derail Jesus' mission, Satan continues to thwart the salvific purpose of God through leading Jesus' disciples astray into perdition. In observing Jesus' teaching the disciples are then fighting the "cosmic battle" with God on earth against Satan's assaults on the community of Jesus.

The redaction-critical reading is aimed at discovering whether and how far considerations of Matthew's modification/transformation of the Jesus tradition from his sources will assist a modern reader in perceiving the authorial intention of the text, both in regard to the meaning of particular words or phrases, and the flow of thought in his arrangement and modification of the

traditions of Jesus.

The findings of our redaction-critical studies of the community discourse are summarized as follows: (1) Comparison with the parallel Markan passage has affirmed our literary reading that "little ones" in Mt 18.6 (and also 18.10,14) is a designation for Jesus' disciples in general. It is indeed the meaning intended by Matthew who has retained Mark's usage of the phrase (Mk 9.41f; cf. Mt 10.42; 18.6). (2) This meaning of "little ones" enhances the probability that in using the expression the "disciples" in 18.1, different from Mark's "twelve disciples" (9.35), Matthew intends the discourse for all disciples, not just "leaders" in his community.

(3) Synoptic comparisons also indicate that in Mt 18.1-4, humility receives a different emphasis from that of the parallel Markan episode (9.33-37). But the fuller meaning of humility may be appreciated only through comprehending the passage in the light of the portrayal of Jesus and the disciples in the gospel story. Similarly, "receiving" and "causing to fall" in Mt 18.5f convey a meaning which is not quite the same as meant in Mk 9.37,42. Their meaning in the Matthean discourse, as we have seen in chapter 7, is located in the text's (18.5-9) thematic relationship with part of the eschatological discourse (24.11-13,29-31; 25.31-46).

(4) A comparison of the literary context of Mt 18.8f with that of Mk 9.43,45,47 suggests that σκανδαλίζει σε may have a causative sense in the discourse: to make oneself

become the stumbling stones to others, rather than the usual sense, as in Mark, of referring to one's own sinful conducts.

(5) Where direct literary relationship with parallel Markan or Q passages are minimal, as in Mt 18.1-4, and part of 18.10-20, redaction-critical considerations cannot provide adequate basis for a satisfactory construal of meaning through Matthew's modifications of his source materials. Nevertheless, based on the textual evidence on synoptic comparisons, redaction-critical considerations may still provide a viable way for discerning the flow of thought of these passages, hence a recognition of appropriate semantic units. As discussed in chapter 6 and 8, redaction-critical considerations do in fact suggest that 18.1-4 and 10-20 form a more plausible flow of thought than the usual demarcation of 18.1-5 and the two-fold division of the discourse into vv 1-14 and 15-35. Redaction-criticism thus furnishes extra-textual evidence in supporting the perception of the flow of thought in our literary reading of the text - it is probably the way these passages were constructed by the evangelist.

(6) In 18.23-35 (on the unmerciful servant) where there is no synoptic parallel, any identification of editorial modifications by Matthew can only be made from the evangelist's redactional pattern or diction elsewhere in the Gospel. The supposed "original" parable resulting from any reconstruction can only be tentative. With other interpreters, I do not find the present Matthean parable

differs substantially from its supposed original in form and content. Matthew uses it for Jesus to lay out the ground for limitless forgiveness and as a warning against an unforgiving spirit.

While located in the opposite ends of the synchronic and diachronic approach, redaction-critical reading of the community discourse does converge with the literary reading in some regards.

In contrast with the literary reading, the central objective of the social-scientific approach consists in establishing the connection of the community discourse with the experience of the Matthean community and its social ethos, and in discovering the significance of the discourse for the community as a whole. "Meaning" is understood not so much located "in" the text as in its author and his original recipients embedded in a socio-historical context. Thus, the social-scientific reading seeks to understand the discourse as (1) revealing the social ethos of the Matthean community - that the Matthean Christians as a whole perceive themselves as living a life in response to a sense of divine presence, and hence the group as the embodiment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. (2) But the discourse and particularly the narrative portrayal of the disciples also suggest the presence of an undercurrent of worldly thinking within the Matthean community that, if left unchecked, may empty the group ethos of its real substance. The discourse is thus also understood as Matthew's articulation of what a life living in conformity to God's

will would mean in the community life. Such life, according to Matthew, must possess a quality of humility reflected in a forgiving spirit, an attitude that does not despise fellow disciples who have "gone astray," as well as in mutual acceptance and assistance in the hardship of everyday life.

The quality of humility is seen by the evangelist as defining, that is, from the sociological point of view, the central symbolic boundary of the group. The disciples' self-designation, "little ones," expresses this required humility. Yet, the meaning of humility is seen only in broad terms by the image of children in connection with their obedience and dependence on parents (18.1-4). Its more precise meaning is open to individual interpretations.

The social-scientific reading does not explore the meaning of a disciple's going astray, as does the literary reading, but is, instead, concerned with the effect of the community effort in seeking a disciple judged to have sinned. It discusses a feasible scenario of the institutionalization of the "community seeking" as described in 18.15-17. Such a "public trial" will have the adverse impact on the sense of community and the emotional assessment of membership with the group. And, if the disciple insists on his innocence, the incompatibility of membership may eventually have the effect of a "self-excommunication."

In the same passage (18.10-20), using insights from speech accommodation theory, the use of "gentile" for

labelling the unrepentant disciple points to the presence of non-Jewish members within the Matthean community, and supports the previous reconstruction of the Matthean community that it is an ethnically mixed group with a predominantly Jewish membership.

The discourse is also read from the point of view of Matthew's historical audience. The reading is in reality a construction of a social feeling or sentiment evoked among members of the Matthean community in reading or listening to the discourse. The words in the discourse evoke a sense of difference or separation from the unbelieving Jewish community (humility, forgiveness). In particular 18.10-20 brings out a sense of the community as the household of God and the meaning of brotherhood expressed in mutual assistance both material and spiritual. The discourse also at times induces in the audience a feeling of "insecurity" with regard to the ultimate salvation.

The (reconstructed) reading represents the first recipients' perception of meaning of the discourse which might not be in the mind of the evangelist when he wrote. But if the evangelist were informed of the reading, it is probable that he would have found it consistent with his thinking as a whole.

In the literary and social-scientific reading, we appear to have a different sense of "meaning." In the literary approach, meaning is located in a perceived structure of narrative relationship. In the social-scientific approach, meaning of the discourse is related to

the historical circumstances of its origin. Both literary and social science approach have a referential dimension, but a different world is referred to: the Matthean community of late first-century, and a modern disciple-reader located near the end of the twentieth century.

II. Readers, Reading Strategies and Interpretative Frameworks

Our three different approaches to the community discourse in Matthew's Gospel have revealed three distinct areas in interpretative processes that set them apart, namely, reader, reading strategy, and interpretative framework. There is, however, commonality in each of these areas that unites the three readings. We shall therefore first identify these common points of contact. It is only when similarities have been discerned that one may appreciate more fully the differences that set apart the literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific approach.

1. *Reader*

A central notion common to our three approaches to the community discourse is that each reader is *not* a first-time reader. Our literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific reader are all conversant with the entire text of the Gospel. This is perhaps most evident in the redaction-critical reading, which presupposes a general familiarity with the entire Gospel of Matthew (and of Mark as well).

Our literary approach combines narrative criticism

with a type of reader response reading adapted from Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response (1978). However, our narrative/reader response reading differs from current reader response criticism in its usual mode of a first-time reading, a model of temporal, sequential reading which is currently in vogue in biblical reader-oriented criticism. The literary approach in this thesis represents a *non-virginal* reading which presupposes the reader's comprehension of the plot of Matthew's narrative and his grasp of the portrayals of major characters in the gospel story.

In our social-scientific reading, the contextual construction of Matthew's Gospel presupposes a reader who is familiar with the whole Gospel. The *Sitz im Leben* and social ethos of the Matthean community are initially reconstructed from the entire text of Matthew (apart from the community discourse).

Thus, although our literary, redaction-critical and social-scientific approaches differ from one another in terms of their way of making sense of the text (reading strategies), they all share the common character of reading a *familiar* text. Each reader in his/her own way reads the discourse with a "total" perspective of the Gospel.

Another shared character of readership pertains to the temporal locations of the readers: each reader (as represented in this thesis) is a *modern* reader, in fact, situated in time near the end of the twentieth century. Perhaps, the modernity of readership is too obvious to be

noted, and its significance to historical interpretation therefore often overlooked.

Each of the three readers approaches the Gospel with a particular "modern" way of reading: (i) an Iserian type of reader-response reading combined with narratology; (ii) a redaction-critical methodology, and (iii) a social-scientific approach appropriating perspectives and theories from social sciences.

Based on an hypothesis of literary relationship of the synoptic Gospels, it is evident that redaction-critical reading is not the way the original recipients of Matthew's Gospel would have read the Gospel, nor is it how Matthew intended his Gospel to be read.

Our literary reading is also not the manner Matthew's historical audience would have comprehended the text. The evangelist's original recipients were listeners; they heard the Gospel read to them. They were thus oriented to a "listening comprehension," understanding the community discourse in more or less isolation from the rest of the Gospel. Our literary reading, however, is a comprehension process in *silence* reading (characteristic of modern "book" culture), reading the community discourse in terms of the characterization and plot of the gospel story. It is not at all certain that this way of reading is what the original audience would have read the narrative.[1]

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[1] On the possibility of intentionless or themeless work, both ancient (such as Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles) and (post)modern, see John Barton, "Reading the Bible as Literature" (1987), esp. 141-48; "Historical Criticism and Literary Interpretation" (1994), esp.12-15.

Like redaction-critics, social-scientific interpreters set themselves the goal to "discover" the "historical" meaning of the gospel text. But in employing conceptual categories and theories from social sciences to express the evangelist's point of view and his way of understanding the community discourse, the reading is tantamount to a reader's modern translation of the "historical" meaning. It is a modern way of expressing what the author meant. But most important, it needs to be recognized that the supposedly authorial intention/meaning is in reality a *construction* by the modern reader. This construed meaning is then attributed to the gospel writer.

Despite these shared point of view, the readers differ by their interpretative interests, so that the interpretation is set in either a literary or a historical direction. The reader in each mode of reading also differs in terms of reading strategy and interpretative framework. Hence, readers approaching the Gospel with a literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific orientation require different kinds of reading competence.[2]

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[2] It is true that a "literary reader" also needs adequate historical knowledge on first-century Judaism and Graeco-Roman world for reading an ancient text like Matthew's Gospel which narrates the story of Jesus in a Jewish and Greco-Roman socio-cultural and political environment. But in a literary reading, the emphasis is placed on the nature of narrative (such as the discerning of narrative features and the interrelations of the various parts) for construing the meaning of a text. In our literary reading, primary reading competence consists in narratology and W. Iser's reader-response type of comprehending a narrative text. See also Vernon Robbins, "Social-Scientific Criticism and Literary Studies," 285-86.

2. *Reading Strategy*

In a sense, a reading strategy, or way of making sense of a text, is ultimately related to the social location of the reader. It is the reader's interpretative interest, theological (or ideological) and religious convictions, community commitment (belonging to a Christian community), and other social factors, which set the agenda for the interpretation of Matthew's Gospel and the community discourse in particular, and influence the general direction of textual interpretation.

Our literary approach is dictated by a "synchronic" interest, concerned with the literary meaning of the present form of the gospel text, without raising such questions as the authorial intention, the Gospel's historical circumstances of origin, or the history of the tradition of the gospel text under study. On the other hand, a historical approach, such as redaction-criticism and social-scientific interpretation is interested in the historical meaning of the text, what the text was intended to mean by its author. The redaction-critical approach has a prominent "literary" element: it works through the details of synoptic comparisons. Yet it is also undeniably historical in that it seeks to discover the meaning of the text as intended by the redactor-author.

Thus, the three approaches are set apart by their respective historical or non-historical ("literary") interest. This difference in objective sets them further in divergent directions because each interpretative objective

has a different reading strategy which aims to achieve its own goal.

However, despite their literary or historical orientations, the three approaches to Matthew's text share a common hermeneutic stance. Ambiguity or obscurity of textual meaning is most often the result of some "information" not having been perceived in the text, or is simply not supplied by the text. When this relevant information is recovered or supplied by the reader, the "meaning" of the text may then be perceived in the further context of this added "data."[3] Reading strategy, then, refers to the perceptions of the *kind* of missing information which renders a text "elusive." Reading strategy is thus the process of getting at this information and using it to make sense of the text. It is the different conception of what this meaning-generating missing information consists of that essentially distinguishes one approach to the Gospel from another.

In our literary approach, it is conceived that a text segment in the community discourse appears elusive whenever there are narrative gaps present in the text. Thus, the reader is initially confronted with the *abrupt* appearance of the motif of humility in the community discourse. Is the motif of humility continued from somewhere in the previous narrative or not, so that its presence in the discourse is the development of an on-going series of events which

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[3] See also Laurent Stern, "On Interpreting" (1980), 124-25.

express the theme? To close the narrative gap, and thus to perceive the meaning of the text, a literary reading strategy envisages a literary scenario: the discourse is an integral part of the story of Jesus, and meaning of the discourse is organically related to certain events around Jesus and his disciples. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the perceived information that would fill in the narrative gap for the comprehension of the discourse with respect to the general theme of humility are: (1) the significance of Jesus' words in the temple-tax incident, and its connection with the second prediction of passion/ resurrection; (2) the community discourse as the instruction part of the second narrative cycle of prediction of passion/resurrection, dialogue, question and Jesus' instruction, which constitute together one episode of the *conflict* between Jesus and his disciples; and (3) the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples a group.

The narrative orientation of our literary approach shows forth more forcefully when it is compared with W.G. Thompson's "vertical analysis" of the community discourse in his 1970 work, and more recently, with D.E. Garland's reading of Matthew's Gospel (1993). As with our literary approach, these two writers represent a "holistic" approach, attending to the final form of Matthew's text and interpret Matthew in terms of Matthew.[4] But Thompson and Garland's readings both lack a narrative perspective. Matthew's Gospel is not seen as a story of Jesus having its

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[4] Thompson 1970:12; Garland 1993:3-4; cf. p. ix.

own narrative world. Narrative categories such as plot, narrative point of view, and characterization are absent in their readings. The community discourse is explicated without relating Jesus' words to the overall portrayal of the disciples, and of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

In his reading of Matthew's narrative, R.A. Edwards's 1985 work shows a greater sensitivity to the narrative flow. Yet his reading, again, is not "narrative." The work is primarily a reader-oriented reading; in fact, it is interested in unfolding a (cognitive) *temporal* reading experience by a "virginal reader."[5]

By contrast, our literary approach has shown how a "non-narrative" text such as the Matthean community discourse may acquire a narrative dimension.

Now we turn to the reading strategy of our redaction-critical reading, and we see clearly a marked difference in the mental process engaged in making sense of the same text. Redaction-criticism seeks the meaning of the gospel text in the evangelist. In its application to the Matthean community discourse, a plausible way to resolve an ambiguity, such as the phrase "one of these children" and "little ones," or the flow of thought of a passage, is to discern Matthew's modification of the tradition in a detailed synoptic comparison. The reading strategy thus takes on an entirely different direction from that in the literary approach. The kind of relevant information to be supplied in the comprehension process is the tradition of

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[5] See also ch. 1.

Jesus which Matthew is thought to have possessed when he wrote, and the editorial changes he made in the process of creating a narrative.

As we have seen in our redaction-critical reading, this reading strategy does have limited success in "discovering" the intended meaning of "little ones" in Mt 18.6 and also 18.10,14, and in discerning the "division" of the text-segment that expresses a flow of thought Matthew probably has in mind, a reading that aligns with the literary reading. This has significant implication for our literary approach: it is possible for a literary reading to coincide with the intention of the gospel author as to what he meant by a certain use of phrase or the general flow of thought.

As a historical interpretation, a social-scientific approach seeks to relate the text to its historical circumstances of origin: what the evangelist intended the discourse to mean in the life setting of his community, and/or how the original recipients would have construed the meaning of Jesus' words. The missing information that impedes comprehension is seen in the absence of the socio-historical circumstances of the evangelist and his community. As part of the interpretative process, the social-scientific reader will attempt first to reconstruct from the limited internal evidence of Matthew's Gospel a set of historical scenarios. Like the background for meaningful conversation, the historical scenes provide the necessary background information to decode the verbal

signs: what was meant. The historical scenarios envisaged about the Matthean community are, to summarize from the discussions in chapter 4:

(1) An ethnically mixed Christian community, with a predominantly Jewish constitution.

(2) A minority group living in a Jewish environment but being socially ostracized as "outsiders" because of its belief and faith in Jesus.

(3) The social ethos of the community: the community as the embodiment of the kingdom of heaven, members who feel themselves living a life in conformity to the will of God.

In sum, the three approaches to the community discourse in Matthew's Gospel take a common hermeneutical point of departure: a text presents ambiguity or obscurity in meaning and therefore needs interpretation because some relevant information is simply absent, or is implicit in the text, and needs to be recovered somewhere from the text or supplied by the reader from outside the text. Our literary, redaction-critical, social-scientific readers envisage different understandings about the nature of this interpretative obstacle. But once perceived, the information "fills" the "textual blank" so that the meaning of the text becomes apparent, or provides the "anchorage" or background against which the text becomes comprehensible.

3. *Interpretative Framework*

In the final analysis, the literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific readings all operate within

an interpretative framework. The interpretative framework is a reader's cognitive and social world which generates, consciously or unconsciously, a set of hermeneutical presuppositions, and influences the reader's way of reading a gospel text. Within a reader's social location, several cognitive elements are determinative of the way the gospel text will be read: the notion of the nature of Matthew's Gospel and its purpose, the conception of textual meaning, and the referentiality of the Gospel. The paragraphs below present a concise contrast between the three different interpretative frameworks associated with literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific reading.

(i) Social Location:

An interpreter's social location determines the social-cultural environment of textual interpretation. On matters of interpretation, it is particularly the social group(s) to which the reader belongs, his/her educational and socio-cultural background, and his/her personal life experiences which contribute to the social-cultural environment relevant for interpretive practice. They foster and shape the reader's beliefs and way of thinking as well as his/her interpretative interest. The reader's view of the kind of writing Matthew's Gospel is (and of the canonical Gospels in general), and how the gospel narrative is understood to have meaning, all take shape within the sphere of his/her social location. And it is the interpretative interest and religious convictions that set textual interpretation in a particular direction.

In this connection with social location, an important point needs to be pointed out concerning the "reader" of the three approaches. The three readers are all situated in the same social location. This is simply because the three different readings are undertaken by the *same* reader, in fact, the writer of this thesis - a Chinese Christian from an evangelical free church brought up in a bicultural society in Hong Kong with an undergraduate education in Physics from an American university.

While the three readings are undertaken by the same reader, in terms of interpretive framework, the three approaches are distinguished by difference in the conception of the gospel writing, textual meaning, and referentiality.

(ii) The Gospel Text:

The episodic character of Matthew's Gospel is readily recognized in the three approaches. The nature of the Gospel of Matthew is, however, differently conceived. Our literary approach studies the text as it now stands, and views the gospel narrative as a story of Jesus with a plot. Based on the synoptic two-source theory, redaction-criticism emphasizes the Gospel as the product of the evangelist's transformation and arrangement of the traditions of Jesus from his sources. And a social-scientific approach regards the Gospel as a text that is a "window," if somewhat tainted, into the situation and experience of the Christian community behind it. Unlike the literary reading, both the redaction-critical and social-

scientific approach lack a narrative perspective.

Thus, in having a different conception of the Gospel, each one of the literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific reading develops an interpretative strategy that corresponds to its own view of the Gospel and seeks a different kind of meaning.

(iii) Meaning of the Text:

In an historical approach to Matthew's Gospel meaning is located in the intention of the gospel author or in his original recipients. In redaction-criticism, close synoptic parallels facilitate a construction of the plausible meaning intended by the author. And in our social-scientific approach the authorial intention is closely associated with the social situation and experience of the evangelist and his Christian group, which is itself a reconstruction from the limited "social" signs perceived in the Gospel.

In our social-scientific reading, we have allowed the possibility of the original audience's reading to differ from the evangelist's meaning/intention (when he wrote), although we think that the two readings are compatible. That is, the historical audience probably also understood the evangelist's intended meaning, and that the former's reading falls within the broader thinking of the evangelist as well.

In the interpretive framework in which our literary approach operates, the way the gospel narrative is understood to have meaning is differently conceived. The

gospel text has a potential of meaning embodied in the different plausible relationships between various parts of the text. Alternatively, meaning is related to the perception of narrative gaps and the way these textual blanks are filled. Thus our literary approach of the community discourse constructs a plausible reading from the potential of meaning in the Gospel. A different reading of the discourse may be produced by another reader, and even the same reader may read the same discourse differently in the future. Meaning is therefore seen to emerge in the process of reading, and the reader plays a significant role in the construction of meaning. This conception of meaning is perhaps best illustrated by a partial analogy with the concept of measurement in quantum physics: a physical measurement (say, energy) actualizes a possible value of energy from a set of discrete energy associated with the finite number of quantum states of a bounded physical system. Meaning is thus the product of the interaction between the text and the reader in a particular social location, just as interaction with the physical system (energy measurement) brings about a particular (eigen)state of the system into reality.

(iv) Referentiality:

Because of the fundamental difference in their views of a Gospel, the literary and historical approaches have different views of textual referentiality.

In our social-scientific approach, the Gospel of Matthew is a referential text, being the "window" to the

Matthean community. Indeed there are narrative comments that indicate a reference to the evangelist's "present" world ("to this day"),[6] and a sentiment of the evangelist and his community in regard to the unbelieving Jewish community ("their synagogue").[7] Moreover, certain episodes concerning the disciples and some of Jesus' saying about them are read as "transparent" of the present situation for the evangelist's community.[8] Since the notion of "narrative world" is absent in the social-scientific reading, Matthew's text is taken to describe a historical reality of first-century Judaism in the land of Israel. Thus, the lumping together of the Pharisees and Sadducees as a description of the Jewish leaders becomes a puzzle, contrary to the historical situation of the political and theological disharmony between the two Jewish groups. In a transparency reading, there is thus the danger that the phrase will cause the reader to draw some unlikely historical conclusion regarding the Jewish leaders in the *evangelist's* social world.[9]

In our literary reading, Matthew's Gospel is conceived as portraying a narrative world. The story world is,

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[6] Cf. Mt 27.8; 28.15b.

[7] Cf. the narrative voice in Mt 4.23; 9.35; 12.9; 13.54; and "their/your synagogue" attributed to Jesus: 10.17; 23.34. See the discussion of the Matthean community in ch. 4.

[8] Apart from the major discourses, cf., e.g., Mt 4.18-22; 8.18-22; 8.23-27; 9.8; 10.1-5a; 12.46-50; 13.51-52; 28.19-20.

[9] See also Kingsbury, "Reflections on 'the Reader' of Matthew's Gospel" (1988).

however, not a rigid self-autonomous world, but is partially "reflective" of the reality of the post-Easter Christian community. First, the plot of the story offers the reader some insight into the religious thinking of the gospel writer. Secondly, with their "dual audience" the five discourses have broken open the self-autonomy of the story world: Jesus' speeches point towards the (extra-textual) reality of the post-Easter Christian community. A third element of referentiality is the characterization of Jesus and his disciples (as a group). This is implicit in the referential character of the discourses. Since a significant part of Jesus' speech in the community discourse is interpreted in the light of the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples, this implies that the characterization of the disciple group becomes itself referential as well. As a character group, the disciples are an index to the reality of discipleship in the community of Christian faith: failure of the disciples in the gospel story also points to the problems of discipleship in the post-Easter time. This referentiality is not so much a "transparency" in individual disciples and events for the present, as portrayal of an essence of discipleship in post-Easter Christian communities. However, in a literary reading, not every character group in the narrative world is thought to be indicative of some group in the real world of the modern reader. The "Jewish leaders" as a group is a case in point; they are probably not referential to the *modern* reader. It is thus obvious

that the judgment of referentiality has in it a subjective element which is inextricably connected with the reader's perception of his/her own social world.

The referentiality is thus differently conceived in a literary and historical approach. In a historical approach, the gospel text is conceived as pointing to the first-century Matthean community. In the literary approach, the reference is to the post-Easter Christian community in general. Secondly, operating within a literary paradigm, the referentiality is from a narrative world to the real world without asking the question whether the description in the narrative world is true or not. In the historical paradigm, the portrayal of the disciples and the Jewish leaders and certain episodes are thought to be "transparent" for the Matthean community.

Thus although there are common grounds in our literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific approach, sharing a common readership and a basic hermeneutic stance, the three approaches differ markedly from each other in their reading strategies operating under their own interpretive frameworks. Each approach seeks a historical or non-historical ("literary") meaning, and thus differs in its way of construing meaning from the text.[10]

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[10] *Contra* John Barton (1994:6), the mental process involved in the construal of meaning in our narrative-reader response, redaction-critical, and social-scientific readings are different.

III. Is There a Norm to Gospel Interpretation?

The different readings of an extended text in Matthew's Gospel have offered concrete illustrative answers to the fundamental question: what does it mean to interpret a gospel text? Each reading presupposes an interpretative framework which shapes the text in a given way. A narrative/reader response approach construes a literary scenario from the gospel text in order to make sense of the text-segment under study; a historical approach envisages a historical situation of the gospel author and understands the text from his perspective; a redactional-critical approach attempts to identify the tradition and sees the authorial intention from the evangelist's transformation of his tradition.

Since the Gospel exhibits narrative and historical aspects, each dimension entails a proper investigation in its own right. The decision as to the choice of historical or non-historical (literary) approach remains with the interpreter's interpretive interest, evaluative and ideological stance. In particular, the judgment about the kind of meaning, historical or non-historical, most fruitful or profitable to pursue (the "best meaning") is an evaluative judgment. Is there, then, a norm to interpretation - how should a gospel text be read, and is there a criterion to textual meaning?

The moot point is the authorial intention. The problem of an author's or speaker's intention and meaning is perhaps obvious in the case of a letter (such as the extant

Pauline epistles) or a speech delivered to a specified recipients (as the Letter of the Hebrews). By the very social nature of the literary form, a personal letter or written homily necessarily presupposes the authorial intention. It is true that misunderstanding occasionally occurs in written communication,[11] but if letter writers conform to the semantic and syntactical conventions and "literary" norms of their social environment, the text would normally convey what the authors intended to mean. Authorial intention (or original meaning) is the norm, or criterion, of meaning for this form of writing. Thus, even in those parts of the text that suffer ambiguity or obscurity in meaning, the "most probable meaning," from among all possible meanings construed by modern readers, is still *attributed* to the intention of the historical writer.

In the case of an extended narrative telling the story of Jesus, such as the Gospel according to Matthew, it is conceivable that the evangelist did intend the text to be read in a certain way and thus have a meaning intended by him. This is, in part, affirmed by the redaction-critical studies of the community discourse. The evangelist did intend the phrase "little ones" to mean Jesus' disciples in general, and that, on the basis of synoptic comparisons, it is most probable that our "division" of the discourse into vv 1-4, 5-9, 10-20 and 21-35 is the way the evangelist construes the flow of thought of the discourse. If Matthew did indeed intend the Gospel to be read in a certain way,

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[11] Cf., e.g., 1 Cor 5.9-13.

then, it is perhaps *morally* obligatory for modern readers to let the authorial intention be the "moral norm" to the interpretation of the Gospel.[12] The text does have a "right" if its author did intend it to be read in a certain way.[13]

Yet, for a narrative text like Matthew's Gospel, authorial intention as an interpretive goal is *practically* unrealizable. Since the Gospel is a narrative telling the story of Jesus, not a letter *directly* instructing the recipients on Christian beliefs and/or ethics, as is in Paul's letters, it is difficult to construe from the text alone how the gospel author intended the narrative to be read. The reading may take either a literary or historical turn. Thus our narrative/reader response approach may offer a way of reading the community discourse in Matthew's Gospel, but there is no telling that this particular literary reading is the way intended by the author, especially the construction of the plot of the story and the relating of the community discourse to the characterization of Jesus and his disciples, or to the other discourses.

Alternatively, the interpretation may take on a historical orientation, as is shown in our social-scientific approach: beginning with a contextual construction of the Gospel and interpreting the discourse

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[12] See E.D. Hirsch,"Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics" (1976), esp. 207-9.

[13] Contra Robert Morgan 1988:7.

in the light of the reconstructed historical circumstances of the evangelist and his community. But since historical reconstruction, especially with regard to the social ethos of the Matthean community, is based on meagre indirect internal evidence from the text and read from a particular social-scientific perspective, the historical reading can claim no more credential than the literary one. In our social-scientific reading, the fact that the audience's reading can be different from one obtained by viewing the text from the evangelist's perspective, also points to the hermeneutical question that the intention, or even plausible intention, of the evangelist cannot in actuality be determined with much confidence.

But there is another plausible historical scenario: what if the author did not himself envisage a particular way of reading? - that is, if the readers are offered the freedom to interpret the narrative as they see appropriate.[14] In this situation, the interpretation takes a decisive literary (non-historical) turn: interpreters understand the text by examining its literary features and structure, without raising the question of the author's possible intention. In fact, a literary approach to Matthew's Gospel, but not the one taken here, may assume this hermeneutic stance of the Gospel as an "intentionless" work.

Redaction-criticism takes the opposite position. In the modification of his sources the evangelist does

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[14] See John Barton 1987:141-48.

indicate his intention in those texts that show his redactional hand at work. Thus on the basis of redaction-criticism, which in turn depends for its validity on the synoptic two-source theory, we may regard that the Gospel of Matthew does show *signs* of authorial intentionality. But unfortunately, as we have seen in the redaction-critical reading of the community discourse, because of lack of *close* synoptic parallel, with no parallel at all in some cases, redaction-criticism of Matthew's Gospel is incapable of making known what the evangelist precisely intended to mean in these situations. We thus have the hermeneutic situation that even if Matthew's narrative is an "intentional" work, the authorial meaning cannot always be determined from a redaction-critical analysis, let alone by a close reading of the Gospel.

Thus the literary, redaction-critical, and social-scientific approaches seek a different kind of meaning, according to the interpretive interest of the interpreter. Since Matthew's Gospel is a religious text, a literary approach appears more relevant for those readers who intend to perceive the contemporary significance of the community discourse for the community of Christian faith. In general, the "validity" or "acceptability" of the literary reading is to be decided by virtue of the plausibility of its perception of internal textual interrelationship. And if redaction-critical considerations have supplied strong evidence of the evangelist's meaning, authorial intention then acts as an external control for the construction of

meaning in the literary interpretation. Authorial meaning itself does not exclude other literary reading, but, in my view, it does require that the literary reading be compatible, or not contradict outright with the author's intention or plausible intention, whenever it can be reasonably discerned from redaction-critical considerations. And, as it turns out, our literary reading is compatible with readings from redaction-critical, and socio-historical interpretation.

APPENDIX

A Narrational Anomaly in the Matthean Discourses and Its Implication for the Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel

As we have seen in chapter 1, in terms of the narrative flow, a summary statement of Jesus' ministry or a series of events in Matthew's Gospel sets the stage for the discourses, linking Jesus' speech temporally to the preceding episodes. On closer examination, the temporal continuity is undermined by a literary anomaly in the temporal relation between the discourses and the unfolding of the story. In the discourse there are some sayings of Jesus which presuppose *prior* knowledge of the narrative posterior to the discourse for comprehending that part of Jesus' speech;[1] these sayings become more meaningful when read in the light of the later narrative. There is thus a temporal problem associated with *chronological* reading. To my knowledge, this narrative feature of the Matthean discourses has not been observed and explored by gospel critics.

This narrational anomaly has been noted in the community discourse concerning the (literary) interpretation of Mt 18.5-9. When read in the light of the parable of the tares (13.24-30,36-45), 24.9-14; 24.29-31 and 25.31-46, the receiving and causing to stumble in 18.5-9 acquires a

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[1] Note the opposite phenomenon, the back reference or allusion in the discourse to preceding narrative: 7.19 cf. 3.10; 10.25 cf. 9.34 (= 12.24).

better sense.[2] This narrative feature which presupposes prior knowledge of the entire gospel narrative is in fact more pervasive in the other Matthean discourses.

In accordance with the temporal sense of narration in Mt 4.12-25 and the portrayal of Jesus' acts in Mt 8-9, the "sermon" given on the mount probably occurs in the early stage of Jesus' public life. The admonition in 5.13-16 to be the "salt" and "light" of the world through one's "good works" presupposes a perspective of world evangelism,[3] which is unfolded explicitly only in the eschatological discourse (24.14; cf. 26.13), and at the end of the gospel story (28.16-20). In 5.19 some disciples have received the role of teaching. Again, this is comprehensible only when one already knows the end of story in which the disciples (the eleven) are explicitly commanded to teach new believers as part of their universal commission of making disciples for Jesus (28.19). Nowhere in the gospel story, that is, before 28.16-20, are disciples told to teach. The mission speech only charges the twelve disciples to a task of preaching (the "gospel of the kingdom") and healing, but not teaching (10.5b-8). Perhaps the clearest indication of this temporal anomaly of knowing the entire story for comprehending the Sermon on the Mount is 7.21-23. The calling of Jesus as κύριε in the eschatological judgment ("on that day") indicates knowledge of Jesus' person and

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[2] See ch. 7 for the literary interpretation of 18.5-9.

[3] So Davies/Allison 1991:472,478,479; see also U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (1989), 249.

salvific power. Yet this is only revealed later in 16.27 and 25.31-46.

In the mission discourse, 10.16-23 (especially vv 17f) presuppose a universal mission. The saying in 10.18, "you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me (ἕνεκεν ἐμου)," is almost certain to be a reference to the preaching of Jesus among gentiles. In particular, the bearing of *testimony* to rulers and gentiles[4] is an allusion to the witnessing to the truth about the salvation of God through Jesus' words, life and death/resurrection,[5] epitomized in the expression, "the gospel of the kingdom."[6] In the experience of reading at this juncture (i.e. at the mission discourse), this implies prior knowledge of the story of Jesus in its entirety as it is represented in Matthew's Gospel.[7] Mt 10.26-27 also point to this direction of reading. In the light of a universal mission, the things Jesus told his disciples in secret refer to something more than Jesus has said in the preceding narration; again, implicit in the sayings is a prior knowledge of the entire gospel story.[8] And, as in 7.21-23, 10.32-33 presupposes a

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[4] In Mt 10.18, αὐτοῖς ("them") in εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν probably refers to the "governors and kings" in the beginning of the verse.

[5] So Davies/Allison (1991:184) along the same line of interpretation.

[6] Cf. Mt 24.14; 26.13. In 24.14, the "gospel of the kingdom" is preached as a *testimony* to all nations; the same phrase εἰς μαρτύριον is used as in 10.18.

[7] Cf. Mt 1.21 esp. with 20.28; 26.28.

[8] Cf. Mt 16.20; 17.9; 28.19f.

confession of faith in Jesus as the messiah (16.16), and the "cross" saying at 10.38 is comprehensible only when one has already known (perhaps after a first reading) Jesus' words about a discipleship of self-denial, pictured in cross-bearing in 16.24-28.

When the parable of the tares is read in the light of 16.18f (οἰκοδμήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησία) and 20.21 (ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ), both texts envisaging a community or kingdom under Jesus' rule, the kingdom of the Son of man ("his kingdom," 13.41) becomes meaningful as referring to the community of Jesus on earth which is under the "rule" of God.[9] This understanding of the kingdom of the son of man as Jesus' community on earth is consistent with the some prominent features common to the Matthean discourses.[10]

Perhaps the most striking example of this literary phenomenon of the discourses presupposing prior knowledge of later parts of the story is found in the eschatological discourse. The discourse is incomprehensible without knowing the gospel ending. The coming of Jesus in glory (24.29-31; 25.31) and the admonitions for "watchfulness" (24.36-25.30) all presuppose the physical absence of Jesus

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[9] See also J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (1963), 82.

[10] (1) The stereotypical phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in 13.42,50 occurs also at 8.12; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30 and they always refers to people who know or claim to know the God of Israel. (2) The rejection theme is a prominent motif in Matthew's Gospel - a rejection by Jesus of those who claim to know him: 5.20; 7.21-23; 8.11-12; 10.32-33; 18.3,21-35; 22.1-14; 25.1-13,14-30. This theme is concentrated in the discourses. See also R.K. McIver, "The Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat" (1995).

from his disciples after his last resurrection appearance reported in Matthew's Gospel (28.16-20). In particular, Jesus' coming in glory implies his "present existence" in the heavenly realm, a state of existence hinted at in Jesus' words at his trial before the high priest: "from now on you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on clouds of heaven" (26.64).

This temporal anomaly of the discourses has important implications for the way of reading the Gospel. (1) It means that (in addition to the contextual incongruity) because of this temporal fore-knowledge, the disciples in the gospel narrative have difficulty in understanding some portions of the discourses. (2) The temporal anomaly implies that the comprehension is achieved through retrospection after *repeated* readings of the gospel narrative. The discourses therefore presuppose a "total" reading, a reading that results from prior knowledge of the whole Gospel after reading the narrative several times. It is, in other words, a reading performed by a non-virginal reader.

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